Śrī Vyāsa Vāṇi

Stories from the Mahābhārata

M Āshutōsh Prabhu

Śrī Vyāsa Vāṇi

Stories from the Mahābhārata

M Āshutōsh Prabhu

Copyright

ISBN (PDF Edition): **978-93-342-3056-7**

First Edition: 2025

Author & Publisher:
M Ashutosh Prabhu
Shri Ayodhyapatidham,
Ganapati Temple Street,
Mangalore- 575001
Email - ashutoshprabhum@gmail.com
Phone - +91 9483475838

Rights & Permissions

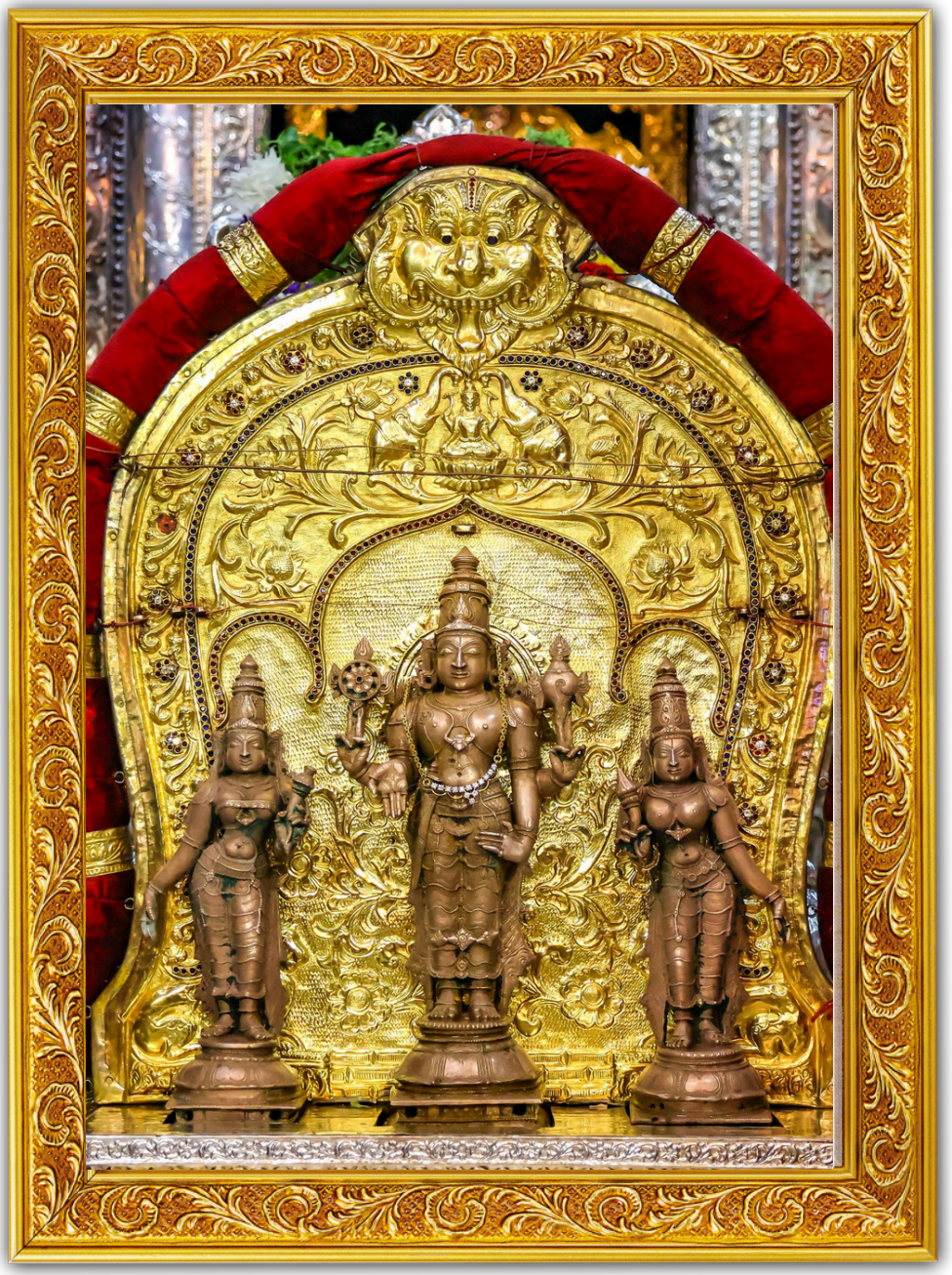
This book is published under a **Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0)**. It may be freely **copied, distributed, and adapted**, provided that appropriate credit is given to the author. No additional restrictions may be applied that legally limit others from doing anything the license permits.

For details, visit:
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

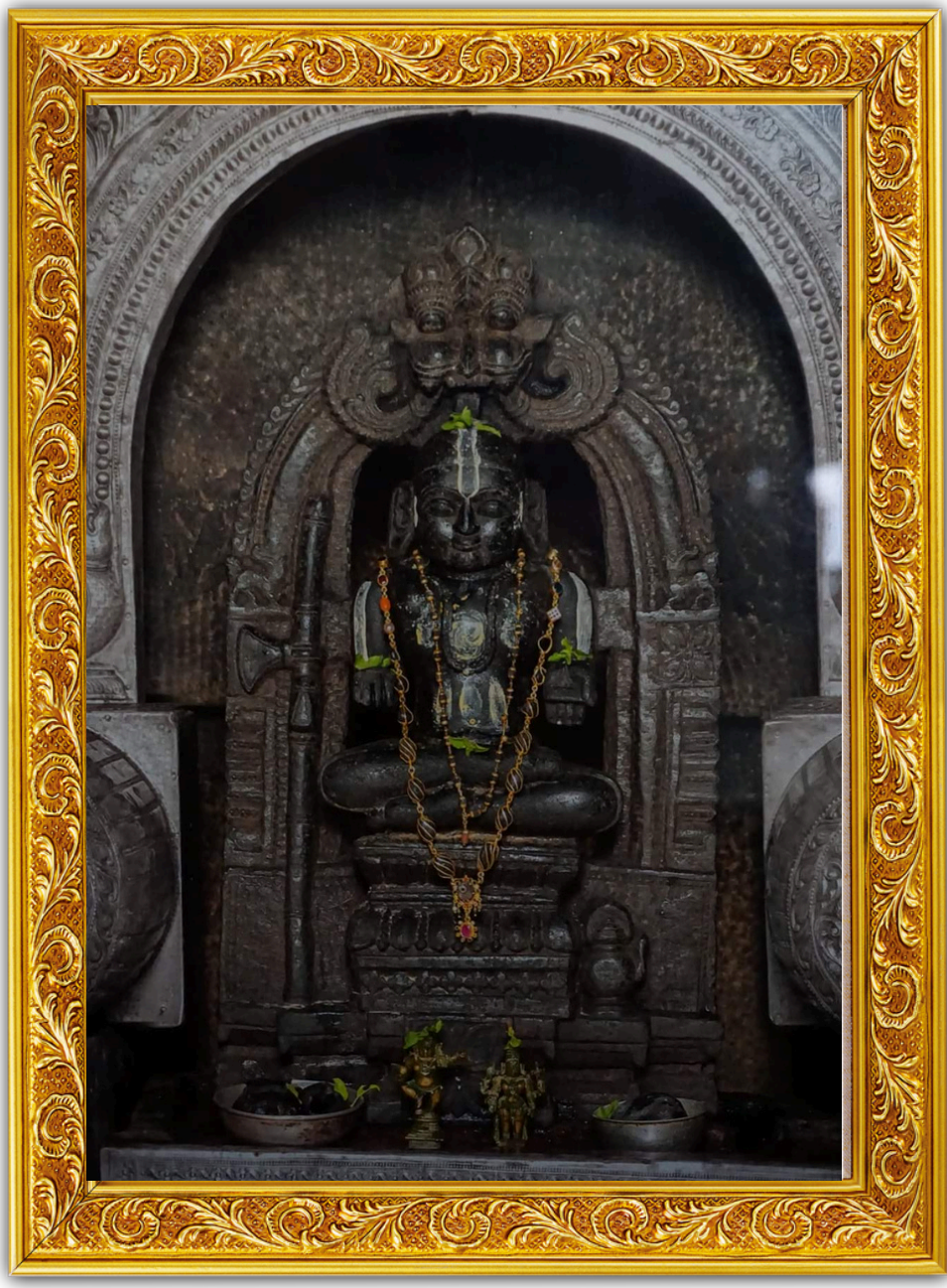
This is a **self-published digital edition (PDF).**

Published in India.

Śrī Vedavyāsaḥ



Śrī Vīra Veṅkaṭeśaḥ



Śrīman Madhvācāryaḥ

Śrīmat Sudhīndra Tīrtha Śrīpādāḥ

Dedication

With utmost reverence and devotion, I dedicate this book to the lotus feet of Śrī Vyāsa Raghupati Nṛsiṁha Upāsya Mūrti of Śrīmat Sudhīndra Tīrtha Śrīpāda, on the auspicious occasion of His 100th birth anniversary.

Preface

The *Mahābhārata* is one of the greatest epics ever composed, a timeless scripture that has shaped the spiritual and moral essence of Bharat for millennia. Authored by Sri Krishna Dvaipāyana Vyāsa, this monumental work spans over one hundred thousand verses and encapsulates the essence of all scriptures, ethics, philosophy, politics, and spiritual wisdom. It is often said that if something is not found in the *Mahābhārata*, it cannot be found anywhere else.

This sacred text was first imparted by Vyāsa to his son Suka and his disciples, including Vaisampāyana. Later, during a grand *yajña* performed by King Janamejaya, Vaisampayana, under the command of Vyasa, narrated the epic to him. In the years that followed, Suta retold the *Mahābhārata* in the same manner to the sages, led by Saunaka, during their great *yajña* in the sacred forests of Naimiṣāraṇya.

At its heart, the *Mahābhārata* is a clarion call for Satya and Dharma. It serves as a moral compass, awakening the conscience of the reader and urging them to tread the path of righteousness. Sri Madhvācharya, the revered proponent of Tattvavāda (Dvaita Vedanta), holds the Itihāsa-Purāṇa Prasthāna in the highest regard, recognizing

it as an authoritative source of Vedānta, alongside the Upanishads, Brahmasūtras, and the Bhagavad Gītā. Among these, He accords special significance to *Mahābhārata* not merely as an epic filled with grand narratives, but as a profound scripture that conveys the deepest truths of Vedānta philosophy and the Vaishnava tradition.

Sri Madhvacharya identifies two fundamental roles that the *Mahābhārata* plays in understanding Vedānta:

1. It encapsulates all essential teachings of Vedānta philosophy.
2. It provides a practical framework for understanding the deeper purport of the Vedas and Upanishads through illustrative examples.

While the Vedas and Upanishads lay out the theoretical foundations of Vedānta, the *Mahābhārata* breathes life into these teachings by demonstrating their practical application through its intricate narratives, moral dilemmas, and real-world challenges. Thus, Sriman Madhvācharya emphasizes its unparalleled importance—both as a source of spiritual wisdom and as a guiding light for the exposition of Vedānta. His magnum opus, Mahābhārata Tātparya Nirṇaya, embodies this vision, going beyond the literal story and delving into the profound moral and spiritual truths concealed within it. This work does not simply summarize sacred texts but systematically

evaluates the moral and spiritual principles enshrined within them. He firmly declares that the supremacy of Nārāyaṇa is proclaimed across all scriptural traditions, including the Vedas, Rāmāyaṇa, Mahābhārata, Pāñcarātra, and their commentaries. The Brahmasūtras, which serve as the guiding framework for interpreting scriptural intent, reinforce this doctrine.

To substantiate this, Sri Madhvacharya extensively quotes passages from the Vedas, Upanishads, Brahmasūtras, Bhagavad Gītā, Mahābhārata, and Bhāgavata Purāṇa, establishing the absolute transcendence of the Supreme Lord. The *Mahābhārata* shows the path to divine grace through unwavering devotion, righteous conduct, and complete surrender to Nārāyaṇa.

Another remarkable feature of the *Mahābhārata* is its composition in three distinct layers of meaning—Darśana Bhāṣa, Guhya Bhāṣa, and Samādhi Bhāṣa:

1. Samādhi Bhāṣa – This conveys the absolute glory of the Supreme God and must be accepted as it is, without misinterpretation.
2. Darśana Bhāṣa – This exists in two forms:
    a. Statements that seem contradictory to what is stated before and after must be interpreted in alignment with the surrounding context or else disregarded.

    b. Passages that simply quote opposing philosophies for the purpose of refutation or to highlight their flaws.
3. Guhya Bhāṣa – These are statements whose apparent meaning is different from their true essence. The deeper meaning must be understood, setting aside the literal interpretation.

These three dimensions of meaning elevate the *Mahābhārata* far beyond a mere retelling of history. They reveal the profound Vedantic and spiritual depth hidden within the epic, offering eternal wisdom that transcends time and context. Maharishi Vyasa himself declares that every incident in the *Mahābhārata* can be understood in at least three ways:

1. Aastikādi (Literal & Historical Interpretation): The epic as a narrative of ā*stikas* (believers), depicting the Pandavas, Kauravas, and other characters as historical figures.
2. Manvādi (Symbolic Interpretation): The characters represent virtues and vices—for example, Yudhishthira embodies *Dharma*, Bhima signifies *Bhakti, Jnana, and Bala*, Arjuna represents *Shavana and Manana*, and Duryodhana symbolizes *Ajnāna* .
3. Uparichārādi (Theological Interpretation): Every event is viewed as a glorification of Nārāyana symbolizing

the spiritual seeker's journey towards the Supreme Being.

Sri Madhvacharya's *Mahābhārata Tātparya Nirnaya* provides deeper insights into the Pandavas' chosen roles during their *ajnātavāsa*, aligning with the three modes of interpretation.

The *Mahābhārata* is more than a tale of warriors and divine interventions—it is an exploration of human suffering, endurance, and the pursuit of Dharma. The trials of the Pāndavas and Draupadī remind us that perfection and the ultimate goal of life are attained only through struggle and suffering. Pain is not a curse; rather, it is the crucible that purifies the soul. Just as impure gold is refined in fire, human beings are shaped, strengthened, and uplifted through adversity. The challenges of life are hidden blessings—silent teachers that awaken wisdom, cultivate patience, and fortify the will.

While the main storyline of the *Mahābhārata* is widely known, the epic is also interwoven with countless short stories—hidden gems buried within the conversations of sages, kings, and divine beings. These stories, though often overlooked, hold immense spiritual and ethical value, offering guidance on Dharma, devotion, and life's deeper truths.

My motivation for writing this book stems from two key reasons:

1. To bring these hidden treasures into focus, allowing readers to appreciate their depth without getting lost in the vastness of the original text.
2. To compile these stories in one place, making them easily accessible instead of requiring readers to sift through the voluminous epic.

This book is not just a collection of stories to me, these are the bedtime tales my mother lovingly narrated to me as a child. They sparked a lifelong curiosity in me, a deep desire to preserve and share them with others. This book is the realization of that aspiration.

I must express my heartfelt gratitude to Shri Vasudev Kamath, who encouraged me to document these stories for our SVT MMT Info WhatsApp group. Without his suggestion, this book might never have been written.

It is truly auspicious that this work comes at a time when we are celebrating the 100th birth anniversary of Shrimat Sudhindra Tīrtha Swamiji of Kashi Math Samsthan, a guiding light who led us on the path of Dharma.

Vedavyāsa, the presiding deity of Kashi Math, is the very author of the *Mahābhārata*, making this an even more fitting occasion.

I am just a beginner on this journey of exploring and sharing the wisdom of the *Mahābhārata*. While I have made every effort to present these stories with accuracy and sincerity, my work may still be prone to errors. If you happen to come across any mistakes or have any suggestions for improvement, I would be truly grateful if you could share them with me.

This book is a humble attempt to bring forth the hidden gems of the *Mahābhārata*, and I sincerely hope it adds value to your reading experience.

There is no greater joy than dedicating this book to Vyāsa, residing in Shri Sudhindra Tīrtha Swamiji. May his blessings be upon all those who seek wisdom through these sacred stories. May the teachings of this sacred epic illuminate our lives at every step. May we walk the path of Dharma. Let the wisdom of the *Mahābhārata* guide us towards truth, righteousness, and liberation!

M Ashutosh Prabhu

Table of Contents

Māhārāja Shibi 1
Pursuit of Krishna 5
Vidula 7
Kuntīdevī 9
Bhīmasēna 12
The Sage and the Dog 14
Dharmarāja and the Mongoose 17
Āruṇi 25
Kacha and Devayani 28
Nālījangha 31
The Fox and the Sage 35
Nriga 39
Jājali 43
Vedavyāsa and the Insect 46
Dīrghadarshi, Pratyutpannamati and Dīrghasūtra 49
Indra and the Parrot 52
The Swan and the Crow 55
The Lazy Camel 59
The Cunning Fox 61
Shāndili 65
Pingala 68
Vasishta and Vishwāmitra 72
Kāmadhēnu 75

Shankha and Likhita 78
Baka and Bhīmasēna 82
Yavakrīta 92
The Hunter and the Birds 96
Power of Humility 98
Alarka 100
Marutta 104
Kundadhāra 109
Shala and Vāmadēva 113
Friendship and Enmity 117
The Fox and the Eagle 121
Indradyumna 125
Nala Damayanti 133
Aṇi-Māndavya 165

Māhārāja Shibi

Once upon a time, in the kingdom of Ushīnara, a grand Yajna was underway, marking the culmination of a significant event. As Mahārāja Shibi approached the completion of the Dāna ritual, a gentle breeze rustled through the air, carrying with it the melodious chirping of birds.

Amidst the solemn atmosphere, a small pigeon, its wings quivering with fear, fluttered down and landed on the lap of the noble king. Seeking refuge, the tiny bird looked up at Shibi with pleading eyes, its distress palpable.

Filled with compassion and empathy, Rājā Shibi immediately understood the bird's plight. Without hesitation, he gently scooped up the trembling creature and offered it sanctuary within the folds of his royal robes. However, the tranquility of the moment was abruptly shattered by the sudden appearance of a formidable hawk, its keen eyes locked onto the vulnerable pigeon concealed with the king!

Sensing the imminent danger, Rājā Shibi addressed the hawk with a firm yet compassionate tone. "O majestic

hawk," he began, "This humble pigeon has sought refuge under my protection. It has entrusted its safety to me, and I cannot turn it away. I implore you to seek your sustenance elsewhere."

But the hawk, driven by its instinctual need for nourishment, countered with a plea of its own. "O noble king," it reasoned, "Food is a fundamental right for all living beings. Would it not be unjust to deny me my rightful meal? While you seek to save one life, have you considered the hunger of my entire family? It is a universal truth that one creature serves as sustenance for another; it is the immutable law of nature!"

With each passing moment, the tension between compassion and survival intensified. The hawk, unwavering in its resolve, pressed on. "Returning my meal to me is not only fair but also in accordance with the principles of Dharma," it insisted. As the deliberation continued, Rāja Shibi found himself grappling with a difficult decision. Should he prioritize the safety of one innocent creature or uphold the natural order of life?

In a moment of profound clarity, the hawk proposed a solemn pact. "Otherwise," it declared, "I would not object if

you were to replace this pigeon with flesh from your own body."

Upon hearing these words, a serene calmness washed over Rāja Shibi's countenance. With a resolute expression, he accepted the hawk's proposal without hesitation. "Indeed," he proclaimed, "I consent to this arrangement. Instead of this pigeon, take flesh from my own body."

And so, an extraordinary exchange took place between the king and the hawk, bound by the principles of sacrifice and compassion. They agreed to provide meat equivalent to the weight of the pigeon, as determined by a makeshift scale.

Despite their efforts, the scale remained unmoved, refusing to register the weight of the pigeon. Undeterred, Shibi resolved to offer himself as the ultimate sacrifice. With unwavering resolve, he placed himself upon the scale, willingly offering his own flesh to protect the vulnerable dove that had sought refuge with him.

In that moment, the true essence of sacrifice and selflessness shone brightly, illuminating the hearts of all who bore witness to the noble act Shibi's unparalleled act of

compassion and sacrifice would echo through the annals of history, inspiring generations to come.

Reference: BORI Vana Parva of Mahābhārata, Chapter 128.

Pursuit of Krishna

As the evening sun painted the sky with hues of orange and gold, Shrī Krishna stirred from his slumber. As his divine eyes fluttered open, they fell upon Arjuna, who sat patiently by his feet, waiting for him to awaken. Pleased by Arjuna's presence, Krishna greeted him warmly, initiating a conversation that would shape destinies.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the room where Krishna had been resting, Duryōdhana grew restless. Eager to gain Krishna's attention, he signaled his presence, prompting Krishna to acknowledge him and inquire about his purpose.

"Duryōdhana," Krishna said, "Tell me, what brings you here today? With a sense of urgency in his voice, Duryōdhana spoke up, expressing his desire for Krishna's impartial assistance in the impending war between their factions.

Acknowledging their familial ties, Krishna addressed both Arjuna and Duryodhana. "You are both dear to me," he said. "I am willing to aid you in your conflict. However, I offer

you a choice: on one side, I can provide all my armies and weapons; on the other, only myself. But remember, even if I stand by your side, I will not wield a weapon or engage in combat."

With the opportunity to choose first, Arjuna wasted no time in selecting Krishna as his ally, recognizing the divine guidance and protection that Krishna offered. On the other hand, Duryōdhana opted for the might of Krishna's armies, excluding Krishna himself.

Satisfied with their decisions, Duryōdhana departed for Hastināpura, while Krishna stood firmly beside the Pāndavas on the battlefield. As the clash of armies echoed across the plains, the outcome of the battle became evident. Despite wielding the vast might of Krishna's armies, Duryōdhana faced defeat, while the Pāndavas, guided by their unwavering devotion to Shrī Krishna, emerged victorious. In the end, the lesson remained clear: the true essence of divinity lies not in what we receive from Krishna, but in the pursuit of Krishna himself.

Reference: BORI Udyōga Parva of Mahābhārata, Chapter 7.

Vidula

When Prince Sanjaya ascended to the throne of Sauvira after his father's demise, he was still young and lacked experience in matters of rulership. His reign faced an immediate challenge as the king of the neighbouring kingdom of Sindhu saw an opportune moment to launch an attack on Sauvira.

Upon learning of the advancing Sindhu army, Sanjaya was filled with fear. His mother, Vidula, encouraged him to take charge and confront the rival king before their forces reached the gates of Sauvira.

The Sindhu King swiftly commanded his troops to launch a relentless assault on the Sauvira forces. Amidst the chaos of galloping horses, clashing swords, and flying arrows, Sanjaya, shaken by the ferocity of the attack, turned his horse and retreated to the safety of the fort.

Observing her son's return from the battlefield, Queen Mother Vidula immediately ordered the fort gates to be shut. Despite his wounds, she sternly urged him to return to the fray without delay.

"Go forth, my son, Return to the battlefield. You have but two choices: emerge victorious and return home triumphant, or continue fighting until your last breath." Vidula's voice echoed from the ramparts of the fort. Upon hearing these stirring words, Sanjaya turned around and charged back into the fray, striking fear into his enemies. His display of courage ignited a fervour among his men, who rallied behind their young king. As the momentum shifted in their favour, the Sindhu king and his forces retreated in defeat, while Sanjaya returned home triumphant.

Kuntīdevī recounted this tale to Krishna and urged him to share it with her sons, the Pāndavas. Despite being the rightful heirs to the throne of Hastināpura, the Pāndavas princes had been exiled from their kingdom for thirteen years. However, upon the expiration of their exile, their cousin Duryodhana refused to relinquish their rightful inheritance. Through Krishna, Kuntīdevīi sent a message to her eldest son, Yudhisthira, urging him to fight for what rightfully belonged to them.

Reference: BORI Udyōga Parva of Mahābhārata, Chapters 131-134.

Kuntīdevī

After the fierce Mahābhārata war concluded, Shrī Krishna prepared to depart for Dwāraka. As he readied to leave, the Pāṇḍavas, along with their relatives, gathered to bid him farewell. With comforting words, Krishna consoled the elders and exchanged greetings before boarding his chariot.

In the midst of this farewell, Uttarā, the daughter-in-law of Arjuna and the wife of Abhimanyu, approached him in distress. Trembling with fear, she implored Shrī Krishna to protect her unborn child from the Brahmāstra that pursued her.

"O Krishna, you are my only refuge! In this dire moment, with death close at hand, I beg you to safeguard my unborn child. Let any fate befall me, but let nothing harm my innocent child," she pleaded desperately to Shrī Krishna. The heartfelt plea of the distressed mother stirred the compassionate heart of the Lord.

In an astonishing display of his inconceivable power, Shrī Krishna entered Uttarā's womb in his divine form. With Sudarshana chakra in hand, he countered Ashwatthāma's deadly Brahmāstra, safeguarding the pregnancy and protecting the unborn child. This child, safeguarded by Vishnu himself, later emerged as the illustrious King Vishnu Rāta, also renowned as Parikshita, to whom Shuka Muni imparted Shrīmad Bhāgavatam.

As Shrī Krishna prepared to depart, Kuntīdevī stepped forward, her hands folded in reverence. Her face radiated with profound devotion and gratitude, a testament to a life enriched by trials and tribulations.

विपदः सन्तु नः शश्वत् तत्र तत्र जगद्गुरो।
भवतो दर्शनं यत्स्यादपुनर्भवदर्शनम्।।

"O Bhaktavatsala! How can I ever repay the debt of your boundless kindness? Your love and care for my family are etched in my heart forever. You saved my child from poison, rescued us from a fiery death Lakshyāgriha, preserved the honour of my daughter-in-law amidst the Kuru assembly, shielded my children during exile, and stood by them in the battlefield. Now, once again, you have safeguarded the last remaining child of our lineage.

Oh Lord! I am aware that in times of crisis, it is your grace that has protected us. Disasters have become a treasure, for they bring me closer to you. Therefore, let me face adversity repeatedly, for in each trial, I find solace in your presence. May I have the privilege of beholding you time and again."

अथ विश्वेश विश्वात्मन् विश्वमूर्ते स्वकेषु मे।
स्नेहपाशमिमं छिन्धि दृढं पाण्डुषु वृष्णिषु॥

A Sādhaka feels hesitant to request anything for personal gain from Krishna. However, householders may find themselves compelled to seek favors from the Lord due to their familial attachments. Kuntīdevī was mindful of this reality, and thus she beseeched Krishna to sever the bonds of affection with Pāṇḍavas and Vṛṣṇis.(Vṛṣṇis belonged to her paternal lineage)

Indeed, Kuntīdevī's prayer for adversity is unparalleled. She possesses the remarkable strength and courage to welcome any peril if it means encountering the divine presence of the Lord. While we may not possess Kuntīdevī's boldness to invite disaster, we should trust that Krishna will come to our aid when calamity befalls us.

Bhīmasēna

Once the bustling activities of the kingdom had settled and the ministers had all departed for their homes, leaving no one but the emperor Dharmarāja himself. In the quiet of the evening, a poor Brāhmana, filled with urgency, approached the emperor for Dāna for a Yajna he was preparing. Dharmarāja, recognizing the Brāhmana's need, assured him to return the next day for Dāna.

As the Brāhmana hurried back to his village, he encountered Bhīmasēna and recounted his encounter with Dharmarāja. Without hesitation, Bhīmasēna, known for his generous spirit, took off his own gold bracelet and offered it to the Brāhmana. Grateful beyond words, the Brāhmana accepted the unexpected Dāna.

Meanwhile, Bhīmasēna, ever playful, seized the opportunity to climb atop the palace and begin playing the large drum placed there. The resonant sound echoed through the palace, catching Dharmarāja's attention. Puzzled, he inquired about the source of the joyous noise.

With a mischievous grin, Bhīmasēna explained, "It is the sound announcing the emperor's enduring presence for yet another day!" Dharmarāja couldn't help but feel a twinge of embarrassment at Bhīmasēna's jest, which served as a gentle reminder of the importance of promptly fulfilling one's Dharma without procrastination.

The Sage and the Dog

In a tranquil forest, a sage devoted himself to rigorous penance, observing fasts and vows with unwavering dedication. Within his hermitage, all creatures, from the majestic beasts to the delicate birds, lived harmoniously, earning the affection of the sage with their purity of heart. Among them, a dog stood out, faithfully accompanying the sage in his ascetic practices, partaking only of sattvic food alongside him. This deep bond between the sage and the dog blossomed into a profound love.

One day, a leopard crossed paths with the dog, intent on making it its prey. Terrified, the dog sought refuge with the sage, who, moved by compassion, transformed it into a leopard, thus saving its life. Some time later, a tiger launched an attack, but again found itself transformed into a tiger by the sage's benevolence. Now as a tiger, the former dog roamed the forest without fear.

During its wanderings, the tiger encountered an elephant, which, in a fit of panic, attempted to trample the tiger. Seeking protection once more, the tiger returned to the sage, who transformed it into a mighty elephant. As the

elephant joyfully explored the forest, it stumbled upon a fearsome lion, which chased it in terror back to the sage, seeking refuge yet again.

By the sage's grace, the elephant turned into a ferocious lion. Forsaking its previous sattvic nature, it turned carnivorous and proudly assumed the title of the king of the jungle. Fearlessly, it prowled through the forest, intimidating smaller animals. However, one day it encountered Sharabha, a creature stronger than itself. Fearing for its life, the lion fled back to the sage. Moved by compassion, the sage uttered, "You shall become Sarabha," thus averting the danger.

Later, the proud dog, believing itself to be the strongest creature due to the boon bestowed upon it by the sage, grew arrogant. It considered the sage to be its only potential threat, forgetting the sage's kindness that had elevated it from weakness to strength. With malicious intent, the dog attempted to attack the sage to rid itself of this perceived threat. However, the sage, discerning the dog's treachery, angrily cursed it, commanding it to revert to its original form as a dog. Thus, the dog lost the blessings it had gained and returned to its former state.

It is detrimental to extend favors to those undeserving of them. Virtues should be esteemed. Does the dog possess the quality of purity? A narrow-minded individual lacks intellectual advancement and squanders the rare chance presented to them.

Reference: BORI Shānti Parva of Mahābhārata,
Chapters 117-119.

Dharmarāja and the Mongoose

After completing the Ashwamēdha Yāga, Dharmarāja embarked on a generous charity. He extended his benevolence to Brahmins, scholars, the impoverished, offering a multitude of gifts such as cows, monetary assistance, gold, clothes and land.

At that moment, a mongoose appeared and addressed the assembled sages, proclaiming, "No charity can match the merit of a Brahmin who adheres to Uncha vritti". The unexpected speech of the mongoose intrigued everyone present, prompting them to gather around and listen attentively.

The mongoose proceeded to narrate the tale of the Brahmin, recounting, "In the ancient city of Kurukshetra, there lived a family of unwavering virtue – a Brahmin, his devoted wife, his noble son, and his virtuous daughter-in-law. Though modest in material wealth, their hearts overflowed with the riches of compassion and selflessness.

This Brahmin family adhered to the practice of Unchavratti, sustaining themselves by gleaning leftover grains from the fields after the birds had taken their fill. With contentment as their constant companion, they embraced a life of humility, finding joy in the simple act of gathering each day's provisions.

However, fate had a formidable trial in store for them. A relentless famine descended upon the land, casting a shadow of scarcity over all. As the pangs of hunger gripped the region, the Brahmin and his family fasted for days, subsisting on the meager provisions they could muster.

After an arduous struggle, the Brahmin finally procured a small quantity of grain, which he carefully carried home, cherishing every precious kernel. With reverence, they sieved and ground the grains into flour, dividing it into four equal portions – one for each family member.

Fate, it seemed, had further tests in store. Just as they were about to partake of their humble meal, a weary Brahmin arrived at their doorstep, his eyes pleading for sustenance. Without hesitation, the Brahmin offered his own

portion to the famished guest, who devoured it swiftly, yet remained unsatiated.

Witnessing the guest's lingering hunger, the Brahmin's wife approached him, her eyes shining with compassion. "Please, offer him my share as well," she implored, "for his needs must be met."

The Brahmin, humbled by his wife's selflessness, presented her portion to the guest. But still, the hunger persisted, casting a shadow of disappointment upon the household.

It was then that the Brahmin's son, his heart filled with nobility, spoke up. "Father, let the guest be truly satisfied. Offer him my portion, that he may find solace in our humble abode."

Moved by his son's generosity, the Brahmin offered the guest the final portion, but the hunger remained unquenched. Disheartened, the Brahmin found himself at a loss, until his daughter-in-law approached, her eyes alight with wisdom beyond her years.

"It is my highest duty to uphold the dharma of our elders," she declared, placing her portion before the guest. "May this offering fulfill his needs."

Upon consuming the offered food, the Brahmin expressed his satisfaction, stating, "You have generously shared the food you rightfully earned, without any hesitation. I am genuinely delighted. The gods and goddesses are rejoicing in your noble act. Your virtuous deed has fulfilled your penance. With a heart full of purity and without any regret, you have donated. Recognizing your righteousness, a celestial chariot is arriving to transport you and your family to heaven. It is time for you to depart."

After the Brahmin and his family ascended to heaven with Dharmadeva, I emerged from my dwelling. As I rolled over the spilled flour, half of my body gleamed with a golden hue, reflecting the Brahmin's selfless charity. Now, I'm in search of another noble soul whose virtuous deeds can transform the other half of my body into gold. Traveling far and wide across sacred lands and places of penance, I heard tales of Yudhishthira's renowned acts of charity and have come here seeking them. Despite exploring every corner of this vicinity, my appearance remains unchanged. Thus, No Dāna matches with the Brahmin's remarkable Dāna

of flour." With these words, the mongoose vanished, having shared the tale of the noble Brahmin.

Charity must stem from a place of genuine sincerity. Merely giving away what we do not need does not constitute true charity. It is essential to offer what is most valuable to us, ensuring it meets the genuine needs of others, all the while maintaining a pure heart devoid of complaints. True charity knows no expectation or grumbling.

Is the charitable act of the Brahmin adhering to the Unchavritti principle truly greater than the grand Ashwamedha Yajna performed by Yudhishthira?

Let us try to understand the deeper significance of this incident through the lens of Bhagavan Acharya's insightful interpretation, in the 30th chapter of Mahābhārata Tātparya Nirnaya.

At the heart of this tale was a peculiar mongoose, who was originally a demon named Krodhasura, an embodiment of anger itself. Krodhasura had committed a grave transgression – he drank the milk intended for shraddha by Jamadagni, invoking the wrath of the Pitru Devatas. As a consequence, he was cursed to take the form of a

mongoose until he disrespected the most revered of beings like Dharmarāja.

During the Ashwamedha Yaga performed by Dharmaraja, Krodhasura, in his mongoose form, witnessed an extraordinary act of charity by an impoverished Brahmin. Despite their abject poverty, the Brahmin and his family selflessly offered their meager portions of food to a hungry guest. Beholding this as an act of supreme generosity, Krodhasura assumed it to be greater than the Ashwamedha Yaga itself, which was graced by the divine presence of Shri Krishna, Parashurama, and Vyasa. The Yāga was performed by Vāyu and Bhārati Devi themselves. In his ignorance, Krodhasura proclaimed the Brahmin's charity to be unparalleled, even rolling in the spilled flour, which miraculously turned his body golden.

However, Ācharya Pūjyapāda elucidates, this transformation was not a result of the flour's inherent power but rather a deliberate act by the Devatās themselves. They sought to reinforce Krodhasura's misguided belief, further solidifying his transgression of disrespecting the devotees of the Lord, the Pandavas.

One might wonder why half of the mongoose's body turned golden after rolling in the padodaka of the Brahmin. Vādirāja Bhagavatpāda clarifies this by stating that neither Lord Krishna nor the others present at the Yajna opposed the mongoose's statement. Consequently, the mongoose firmly believed in his wrong knowledge (Anyatha Jnāna) and attained Tamas.

In reality, the mongoose's golden hue did not result from rolling in the spilled flour. Instead, it was the Devatās themselves who turned his body golden, reinforcing his misguided belief in his wrong knowledge. If the padodaka itself had the power to transform things into gold, then the floor should have turned into gold after the Atithi Brahmin washed his feet. Moreover, if padodaka possessed such power, the hands of Brahma and the head of Shiva should have turned golden after washing Vishnu's feet. However, this did not occur, which clearly indicates that padodaka alone cannot turn objects into gold.

For how could the humble offering of food surpass the magnificence of the Ashwamedha Yaga, performed with the utmost devotion and guided by the very instructions of Vyasa? The crux of this tale lies not in the comparison of charitable acts but in the understanding that magnitude of

punya is determined solely by Vishnu Preeti – the act of pleasing Lord Vishnu. The Pandavas, through their unwavering devotion and adherence to Dharma, had attained the ultimate Vishnu Preeti, rendering their Ashwamedha Yaga an unparalleled feat of piety and righteousness.

Reference: BORI Āshwamēdhika Parva of Mahābhārata, Chapters 91-96.

Āruṇi

In the ancient land of Pānchāla, there lived a young seeker named Āruṇi, whose thirst for knowledge knew no bounds. He found himself drawn to the wisdom of the revered sage Ayōda Dhaumya and sought to become his disciple, surrendering himself to the Guru's guidance.

One day, as Āruṇi diligently studied under Dhaumya's tutelage, the Guru summoned him and imparted a task. "My child," he said, "the water that nourishes our fields must be contained, allowing it to seep into the soil and render it fertile. But alas, the bund that separates the fields has been breached, and the water now escapes unchecked. Go forth and rectify this situation"

Without hesitation, Āruṇi ventured to the field, his heart filled with determination to fulfill his Guru's command. True to Daumya's words, the bund lay broken, and water gushed forth, threatening to inundate the land. Undeterred, Āruṇi toiled relentlessly, attempting to impede the flow with stones and mounds of mud, yet his efforts proved futile, and the water continued its unabated course.

As the sun rose the following day, the other disciples gathered in the presence of their Guru, engaging in their daily rituals. Dhaumya, ever attentive, noticed Āruṇi's absence and inquired about his whereabouts. The disciples responded, "He remains in the field, endeavoring to halt the flow of water, as per your instructions."

Suddenly, the Guru's memory was jogged, and he exclaimed, "Ah, yes, it was I who sent him on this task yesterday. Yet, Āruṇi has not returned. Let us venture forth and ascertain the circumstances for ourselves."

The Guru, accompanied by his disciples, made his way towards the field and called out affectionately. Āruṇi, who had been lying across the field, heard his Guru's voice and emerged, covered in mud. After brushing off the soil off his body, he humbly approached the Guru and said, "Revered Guru, the soil of this ground was not firm enough to stem the flow of water. Thus, I had no choice but to use my own body as a barrier to halt its progress."

The Guru was greatly pleased by Āruṇi's unwavering devotion and his willingness to go to such lengths to obey his

order. With a heart full of admiration, he addressed him, "My dear child Āruṇi, I am deeply touched by your steadfast obedience. From this day forth, you shall be known as Uddālaka. May you acquire profound knowledge of the Vedas and Dharmashāstras. May your journey towards Grahastha Āshrama be a fruitful one"

Thus, blessed by his Guru's words, Āruṇi, departed from the Gurukula to embark upon his new life as a householder. Henceforth, he was recognized by all as Uddālaka Āruṇi, a name that carried the weight of his Guru's blessings and his own unwavering dedication to the pursuit of knowledge and righteousness.

This tale of Uddālaka Āruṇi reminds us that true knowledge is not merely acquired through words or texts, but through a steadfast commitment to walking the path laid out by those who have transcended the boundaries of the material world.

Reference: BORI Ādi Parva of Mahābhārata, Chapter 3.

Kacha and Devayani

During a battle between the Devas and the Danavas, the Danavas emerged victorious. Their Guru, Shukracharya, had mastered a new science: the art of reviving the dead. To learn this science, the Devas sought out a suitable candidate named Kacha, the son of Brihaspati. Despite being the son of their adversary's guru, Brihaspati, Shukracharya welcomed Kacha as his disciple. Over time, Kacha earned Shukracharya's affection and trust. Witnessing the bond between guru and shishya, the Danavas grew furious.

Kacha also became dear to Devayani, the beloved daughter of Guru Shukracharya, who served her father diligently. Once, Kacha was tasked with taking the cows out for grazing in the forest. Seizing the opportunity, the Danavas ambushed and slaughtered Kacha, feeding his remains to the wolves. While the cows returned to Shukracharya's house in the evening, Kacha did not. Devayani grew anxious and asked her father to bring Kacha back. In response to his daughter's plea, Shukracharya revived Kacha. Devayani's joy angered the Danavas.

The Danavas attempted to kill Kacha a second time, but Shukracharya revived him again at Devayani's urging. Determined to ensure Kacha's permanent demise, the Danavas devised a plan to conceal Kacha within Shukracharya's body. After killing Kacha, they burned his body and mixed the ashes into liquor, which they offered to Shukracharya. When Devayani lamented Kacha's absence and implored her father for help, Shukracharya summoned Kacha. To his surprise, Kacha responded from within him, revealing that he had entered Shukracharya's body through the liquor he consumed. Confounded by this revelation, Shukracharya presented Devayani with a difficult choice: to save either Kacha or himself, as Kacha's life was intertwined with his own.

Considering the circumstances, Shukracharya reached a resolution. Addressing Kacha within him, he declared, "Kacha, your mission shall be fulfilled. I will impart to you the knowledge of Sanjeevini. You will sustain yourself through Sanjeevini, while I embrace death. When the time comes, you shall revive me using the Sanjeevini you have learned from me."

Kacha emerged from Shukracharya's abdomen and successfully revived him using Sanjeevini. With his mission

accomplished, Kacha sought to return to heaven. However, he couldn't depart without bidding farewell to Devayani. Requesting permission from Devayani, Kacha was met with eager approval from her.

"Kacha, I cannot bear to part from you. I will accompany you as your spouse. Will you not agree?" pleaded Devayani.

Kacha replied, "That is not feasible. I have resided within the belly from which you obtained this form. Hence, I can only be your elder brother, not your husband. Please forgive me."

Devayani found herself unable to accept this reality. In her anguish, she cursed Kacha, declaring, "The knowledge for which you have deceived us shall not yield its desired outcome." Thus concluded the tragic tale of their love.

Reference: BORI Ādi Parva of Mahābhārata, Chapters 71-76.

Nālījangha

Once upon a time, in a land where the forests were lush and teeming with life, there lived a Brahmin named Gautama. Despite his noble lineage, Gautama was a man consumed by poverty and ignorance, unversed in the sacred Vedic scriptures. Bereft of righteous deeds, he resorted to hunting as a means of sustenance, shielded by the protection of a thief, driven by an insatiable thirst for riches.

On one of his many journeys through the enchanting woodlands, where birds sang mellifluously amidst blossoming flowers, Gautama found himself weary and in need of rest. Seeking refuge under the shade of a towering tree, he succumbed to exhaustion, drifting into a deep slumber. Perched atop this very tree was a magnificent swan named Nālījangha, its feathers glistening like burnished gold in the dappled sunlight.

Delighted by the unexpected arrival of a guest, the swan greeted Gautama warmly, extending a hospitable welcome with soothing words and refreshing fruit juice. With a tender touch, it crafted a comfortable resting place for

the weary traveler, fashioning a soft bed of twigs, while its gentle flapping wings provided a cooling breeze that lifted Gautama's spirits.

Inquiring about the purpose of Gautama's journey, the swan asked, "Brahmin, what brings you to these verdant depths? What is your heart's desire?" Gautama responded without hesitation, "I have come in search of wealth, for riches are my sole pursuit." To this, the swan replied, "Then remain here for today and depart on the morrow. At the edge of this forest dwells a demon king, an acquaintance of mine. Present yourself to him as my friend, and he shall provide you with the riches you seek."

True to the swan's word, the following day, Gautama approached the demon king and introduced himself as the acquaintance of the noble swan. Delighted by this introduction, the king welcomed Gautama with open arms, hosting him extravagantly and bestowing upon him great riches before bidding him farewell on his journey.

As Gautama retraced his steps, he found himself once again beneath the tree where the swan resided. The swan greeted him warmly once more and offered him shelter under its boughs. However, Gautama, consumed by evil

thoughts, forgot the kindness shown to him earlier. Struggling to carry the heavy bundle of wealth, he contemplated the difficulty of his burden, worrying about the scarcity of food for the journey ahead.

After much deliberation about his dwindling provisions, Gautama resolved to commit an unforgivable act – he would kill the swan and take its flesh for sustenance. Waiting for the unsuspecting bird to fall asleep, he seized the opportunity, ending its life, plucking its wings, and consuming its flesh before departing, his heart hardened by greed.

The swan, accustomed to visiting its friend, the demon king, daily, failed to appear for two consecutive days. Concerned by its absence, the demon king dispatched his servants to investigate. Discovering the swan's wings beneath the tree, the enraged servants traced the culprit, the treacherous Brahmin Gautama. They swiftly apprehended him and presented him before the king, who, incensed by such betrayal, decreed his execution.

Gautama met his end at the hands of the king's servants, and his remains were left for the eagles to devour. However, even the birds of prey refused to partake of the

flesh of such an ungrateful individual, repulsed by his ingratitude.

The bones of the swan were gathered for cremation, but before the pyre could be lit, Indra, the king of the devas, manifested in all his celestial glory. Moved by the swan's selflessness, Indra restored the noble bird to life and bestowed upon it a divine blessing. The swan, enriched by its virtues and the experience, emerged spiritually transformed, a testament to the triumph of kindness over cruelty.

And so, the tale of the ungrateful Brahmin and the noble swan serves as a timeless reminder that greed and ingratitude bear bitter fruits, while compassion and virtue pave the way to true enlightenment.

Reference: BORI Shānti Parva of Mahābhārata , Chapters 162-167.

The Fox and the Sage

When Dharmarāja asked Bhīshma about the most crucial refuge for humans—whether it's relatives, karma, money, or consciousness— Bhīshma responded with a poignant analogy, highlighting the importance of consciousness. He illustrated that enduring difficulties fearlessly and utilizing them as catalysts for growth signifies true wisdom.

Once, a wealthy merchant, driving his chariot, accidentally struck a sage descended from Kashyapa. The sage, deeply grieved by this incident, found himself overwhelmed with despair. He contemplated his fate, feeling devoid of purpose and incapable of achieving anything. Overwhelmed by sorrow, he collapsed, drained of both physical and mental strength, unable to rise and contemplating ending his life.

It was at this moment that Indra witnessed the sage's anguish. Moved by compassion, he took the form of a wise fox and approached the despondent sage.

"Child," the fox spoke softly, "among all creatures, humans hold the highest status, for to be born as a human is the aspiration of all other beings. You, born as the son of a revered sage, belong to the most exalted lineage. Do you, possessing such a rare birth, contemplate ending your life in destitution?"

The sage, taken aback by the fox's eloquence, listened intently as the wise creature continued.

"Consider my plight—I lack hands like yours. I yearn for the ability to remove a thorn stuck in my leg, to defend myself against adversaries. Humans are blessed; they can conquer foes, adapt to weather by clothing, consume nourishing food, erect shelter, and benefit from the milk of cows. They possess the capacity to domesticate animals for their needs."

"Indeed, it is your fortune not to be born as a fox like me. However, I cannot entertain the thought of ending my life, for even this lowly birth is preferable to the possibility of a more wretched existence."

The sage, intrigued by the fox's wisdom, listened attentively as it imparted profound truths.

"Son, in your current sorrow lies the potential for joy. Within you resides the mind, the origin of desires and actions, and the senses that aid it. Fear not, for desire knows no bounds; it only grows with exposure, much like fire fueled by wood. Such knowledge belongs inherently to humanity. Yet, some succumb to vices squandering their invaluable birthright. Consider the marvel of life's diversity; despite disabilities or afflictions, you stand whole and privileged, born into a noble lineage, possessing wisdom and virtues. It would be sinful to forsake such blessings by contemplating suicide. Arise, for it is unfitting for you to despair thus. Embrace righteousness, devotedly pursue Vedic studies, meditation, and acts of charity. Make your human existence meaningful."

The fox then revealed a startling truth about its past life. "Similar to you, I too was once born as a human, but due to my involvement in fruitless and endless debates, I found myself reborn as a fox. However, I am aware of my eventual return to human form through virtuous deeds. If I were to return as a human like you, I would engage in noble actions such as Yajna and Dāna."

The sage was taken aback by the wise fox's words, finding them resonant and insightful. He held the fox in high regard, captivated by its intelligence. Bidding farewell to the fox, he set out to pursue his goals with renewed determination, armed with the wisdom that even in the darkest of times, the human spirit can find light and purpose through mindfulness and fortitude.

From that day forth, the sage embraced his human existence with gratitude and purpose, dedicating himself to righteous deeds and the pursuit of knowledge, forever inspired by the wise words of the extraordinary fox.

Reference: BORI Shānti Parva of Mahābhārata , Chapter 173.

Nriga

Once upon a time, there was a righteous and charitable king named Nriga. Known for his generosity, King Nriga had a daily vow of donating thousands of cows to Brahmins.

One day, as part of his daily ritual, he gifted a herd of a thousand cows to a Brahmin. The Brahmin gratefully accepted the donation and headed home with the cows. Among these cows was one that was very familiar with the palace grounds. That night, the cow managed to escape from the Brahmin's herd and returned to the palace.

The next day, unaware of the cow's return, King Nriga donated another thousand cows to a different Brahmin. This new herd, unfortunately, included the 'escaped' cow. Meanwhile, the first Brahmin, realizing that one of his cows was missing, began searching for it.

On his way, the first Brahmin spotted his cow among the second Brahmin's herd. A dispute quickly arose between the two Brahmins, each claiming ownership of the cow.

Unable to resolve the matter themselves, they decided to seek justice from King Nriga.

Both Brahmins presented their case before the king, explaining the situation. King Nriga found himself in a difficult position, tasked with resolving the dispute over the escaped cow that had inadvertently been donated twice. The king was helpless in resolving the dispute. Enraged by the situation, both Brahmins cursed him, declaring, "May this mistake cause you to be reborn as a chameleon!"

Despite the curse, King Nriga remained calm and consoled the Brahmins. Gradually, their anger subsided, and they suggested a path to redemption: achieving liberation through the sight of Shrī Krishna.

Due to the merit accumulated from his lifelong charity, King Nriga retained the memory of his past lives. Thus, for a small mistake, he endured the curse of becoming a chameleon, but ultimately, he was granted the profound blessing of encountering Lord Krishna and attaining liberation.

In the Dwāpara Yuga, the Yādavas once ventured into a lush grove for recreation. After a long journey, they

became thirsty and searched for water. They stumbled upon a waterless well and were surprised to find a chameleon trapped inside. Despite their best efforts to lift the chameleon out with ropes, they failed.

Frustrated and curious, they informed Shrī Krishna about the peculiar creature. Krishna came to the well, observed the situation, and effortlessly jumped in. With his left hand, he lifted the chameleon out of the well with ease.

The moment the chameleon was touched by Shrī Krishna, it transformed into King Nriga, adorned in beautiful, divine garments. Overwhelmed with gratitude and reverence, King Nriga fell at Shrī Krishna's feet and prostrated himself, finally free from his curse.

After liberating King Nriga, Shrī Krishna addressed the Yadavas with a stern lesson: "Never steal the property of Brahmins, no matter how small it may be. Even the brightest fire cannot consume such an offense. There is no remedy for the curse of a Brahmin. Poison may kill a single being, but a Brahmin's curse can destroy an entire clan. If you take their possessions by force, ten generations of your lineage will suffer in hell."

The moral of the story is, we must be extremely cautious with what belongs to Shrī Hari and the offerings to Brahmins. Misusing even the smallest part of these can lead to severe consequences.

Reference : BORI Anushāsana parva of Mahābhārata, Chapter 69.

Jājali

Jājali lived in the forest as a great ascetic. Through rigorous penance, he achieved significant spiritual heights. During the rainy season, he would immerse himself in cold water, and in the scorching summer, he would stand under the hot sun, continuing his penance. Sustaining himself solely on air, Jājali would sometimes stand for days on end, lost in his ascetic practices. Yet he boasted himself that there was no pious person like him.

Once, Jājali stood as still as a tree, deeply engrossed in his penance. Over time, his body became blackened and his hair tangled, providing an ideal spot for two birds to build a nest in his braid. The compassionate sage tolerated their presence without complaint. After many days, the female bird laid eggs, and soon the chicks hatched. They grew, learned to fly, and ventured out each day for food, returning to the nest in the evening. Jājali remained calm and unmoving, careful not to disturb the birds. He found joy in their activities and felt a sense of pride in his ability to remain still and undisturbed.

One day, the birds left the nest and did not return for many days. Realizing they were gone for good, Jājali decided it was time for him to move on as well. Pleased with his endurance and compassion, he was proud with a deep sense of accomplishment.

Then, an incorporeal voice addressed him, "Jājali, you are arrogant. There are many in the world greater than you, none of whom are as conceited. You are no match for Tulādhāra in terms of Dharma. Go and meet him."

Heeding the voice, Jājali immediately set out to find Tulādhāra. Tulādhāra, a trader who earned his living by lending money at interest, welcomed Jājali warmly upon his arrival.

Before Jājali could speak, Tulādhāra recounted everything about Jājali's penance, the birds building a nest in his hair, and how he had come to see him after hearing the mysterious voice. Jājali was taken aback by Tulādhāra's unprecedented knowledge. He listened intently as the merchant imparted profound insights on Dharma and life. The more Tulādhāra spoke, the more Jājali realized the depth of his wisdom.

Tulādhāra recounted various teachings, illustrating the importance of humility and the dangers of pride. Jājali, who had once believed himself to be unrivaled in piety, now saw his own shortsightedness. He recognized that true spiritual growth required humility and an open heart.

Humbled by Tulādhāra's wisdom, Jājali understood that a genuine seeker should never be proud. This encounter transformed his perspective, leaving him with a renewed sense of purpose and a deeper understanding of Dharma.

Reference: BORI Mahābhārata Shānti Parva, Chapter 256.

Vedavyāsa and the Insect

Can anyone truly give up their admiration for their own body? Only yogis can achieve such detachment. No matter the creature, whether a worm or a king, there is an inherent love for one's own body. This love persists regardless of the body's condition—deformed or beautiful, diseased or healthy. This is illustrated in a story from the Mahābhārata.

Once, Vedavyāsa, who understood the language of all creatures, saw a frightened insect on a road where chariots were moving swiftly. Concerned for its safety, he approached the insect and asked, "O insect, why are you afraid? Where are you rushing off to so quickly?" asked Vedavyāsa.

The insect replied, "Sir, I am terrified by the loud rumbling sound of this chariot. I fear that the wheels may crush my body and take my life. The breathing of the bullocks sounds like a whirlwind to me, and the various commands of the drivers make me tremble. Death is dreadful for all living beings, and life is very precious to everyone."

Vedavyāsa responded, "O insect, why do you cling to this fearful body? Let go of it. Death is not more terrible than living in constant fear. And what happiness have you truly experienced in this body? You have not enjoyed the real taste of sound, touch, form, flavor, or smell. Is death not a release?"

To this, the insect said, "The body in which one lives is passionately loved by them. I am content in this body, and I wish to live. Even in this form, I enjoy sights, tastes, and smells according to my abilities. What brings happiness to humans does not necessarily bring happiness to insects. I once lived in a human body. Back then, I was a miser who led a selfish life and could not tolerate others' prosperity. I am still sad because I failed to properly serve my mother."

Vedavyāsa replied, "O insect, you are in this form due to the great virtue of serving your parents. I know all your sinful deeds, but your time of redemption is near. In your next life, you will be liberated and reborn as a good Sādhaka."

The insect received Vedavyasa's grace. After experiencing various pleasures even in its insect body as a

king, In its subsequent life, it was born as a Brahmin and ultimately attained salvation.

Reference : BORI Anushāsana parva of Mahābhārata, Chapter 118.

Dīrghadarshi, Pratyutpannamati and Dīrghasūtra

Generally, there are three types of people in the world: those who are very cautious about the future, those who can face danger when they encounter it, and those who always put off what needs to be done. The last group, those who procrastinate, often face serious consequences. The story of these three categories is illustrated through the parable of the fishes.

In a dense forest, there was a lake where three friendly fishes lived along with many other fish. One of these three fishes had the nature of planning ahead and acting accordingly, earning it the name Dīrghadarshi. The second fish, named Pratyutpannamati, used its intelligence to respond to situations as they arose. The third fish, known as Dīrghasūtra, was naturally lazy and procrastinate. Despite their different natures, these three fish lived happily in the lake with the other fish.

One day, some fishermen arrived at the lake. Seeing the abundance of fish, they were delighted and decided to

drain the pond's water. Dīrghadarshi, the fish who always planned ahead, observed the fishermen's actions and understood their intentions.

He immediately warned the other fish, saying, "The fishermen's actions are a clear danger to all of us. We must leave this place before they drain the water. Those who foresee impending danger and take steps to avoid it will not suffer. We need to leave now and find another place to live."

However, Pratyutpannamati responded, "Let the danger come, as you say. When the time comes, I will use my intelligence to survive." Dīrghasūtra, the lazy fish, said, "What's the hurry? Let's live here happily. I don't think there's any need to leave this lake so quickly."

Dīrghadarshi did not heed the words of the other two fish. He left the lake and swam through a canal to another lake. After a while, the fishermen returned, found the water level low, and began catching fish.

Dīrghasūtra was caught in the net the first time it was thrown. As the fishermen continued to catch fish, Pratyutpannamati cleverly got tangled in the threads of the

net from the outside, pretending to be caught. The fishermen did not realize this fish was not truly caught.

When the fishermen brought all the fish to be washed in the water, Pratyutpannamati seized the perfect moment and escaped. Only the lazy fish, Dīrghasūtra, perished, while the other two fish survived through foresight and cleverness.

Thus, whoever is foolish and does not know what to do in times of danger will perish like Dīrghasūtra. He who, out of pride in self-sufficiency, does not take steps to prevent danger beforehand will face challenges but might survive through quick thinking, like the fish called Pratyutpannamati. He who anticipates danger and makes an effort to escape from it will be happy and secure, like Dīrghadarshi.

Reference: BORI Shānti Parva of Mahābhārata, Chapter 135.

Indra and the Parrot

Outside the state of Kāshi, there lived a hunter who used poisoned arrows for hunting. His aim was impeccable, and he never missed when targeting beasts. One day, while hunting, he spotted a herd of wild animals and quickly shot an arrow from his bow. However, this time the arrow missed its mark and struck a tree instead.

This tree, once lush with green leaves and abundant with fruits and bird nests, gradually lost all its vitality due to the poison from the arrow. The leaves, flowers, and fruits withered and dried up.

A parrot had been living in that tree for a long time. When the other birds saw the tree's decline, they all left in search of new shelter. However, this parrot remained, as the tree had been his home for so long.

Every day, the parrot's health declined along with the tree. Due to its good qualities and generosity, the parrot chose to share in the tree's suffering. Despite growing weaker, it refused to leave. Eventually, it became so weak that it could no longer even call out.

Indra was astonished to find a parrot willing to die alongside the tree. He thought, "This bird shows a kindness unseen in humans." Disguised, he approached the parrot and asked, "Why are you still taking shelter in this withered tree?"

The parrot replied, "I was born and raised here. Until now, I have lived under its shelter, as calm and peaceful as a child in its mother's lap. How can I abandon the tree now that it is in difficulty? Is it right to enjoy someone's protection in good times and then leave them in times of trouble?"

Indra was pleased by the kindness of the little bird. Delighted, he said, "I am pleased with your sense of righteousness. Ask for any boon you desire." Indra then sprinkled nectar on the dry tree, and it became as beautiful as before, with new shoots, leaves, flowers, and branches.

Many people enjoy the happy moments of friendship but disappear when sorrow strikes. What is the value of a friend who abandons us in times of grief? Shouldn't we embrace sorrow just as we celebrate happiness? Both are bestowed by the same Lord. Bhagavān Vyāsa illustrates this concept of combining steadfastness and compassion

through the example of this little bird. Thus, those who remain devoted and steadfast in their relationships will be blessed.

Reference: Anushāsana Parva of Mahābhārata, Chapter 11.

The Swan and the Crow

In the middle of the sea, on a beautiful island, lived a virtuous and wealthy Vaishya with many children. Every day after their meals, a crow would come to eat the leftover food. There was always an abundance of food, and the crow grew proud, believing it was the only one enjoying such fine fare. His arrogance led him to insult the other birds.

One day, a flock of swans flew by. The crow, filled with pride, decided to show off his flying abilities. He called out to one of the swans and challenged it to a race. "Let's fly together and see who can soar higher," the crow boasted.

The swan, amused but silent, accepted the challenge. Confident in his abilities, the crow bragged, "I know many kinds of flight, and no one can compete with me. I can easily outfly anyone, no matter how far."

Uddīnamavaḍīnaṁ ca praḍīnaṁ ḍīnamēva ca
niḍīnamatha saṇḍīnaṁ tīryanagatāni ca viḍīnaṁ
pariḍīnaṁ ca parāḍīnaṁ suḍīnakam |
abhiḍhīnaṁ mahāḍīnaṁ niḍīnamatiḍīnakam

avaḍīnaṁ praḍīnaṁ ca saṇḍīnaṁ ḍīnaḍīnakam |
saṇḍīnōḍīnaḍīnaṁ ca punarḍinaviḍīnakam
samhātaṁ samudīṣaṁ ca tatōnmadvatiriktakam|
gatāgatapratigataṁ baśca nikulīnakāḥ ||

"Swans! Listen as I tell you the various ways I can fly," boasted the crow. "I can perform Uddina (flying upwards), Avadina (flying downwards), Pradina (flying in all four directions), Deena (flying normally), Nidina (flying slowly), Sandina (flying gracefully), Tiryagina (flying horizontally), Vidina (flying in the same way as another bird), Parideena (flying in all ten directions), Paradeena (flying backward), Sudeena (flying towards heaven), Abhideena (flying straight ahead), Mahadena (flying very fast), Nideena (flying without flapping the wings), Atideena (flying tremendously fast), and Sandinodinadin (starting to fly beautifully and then flying high and low), Virittakka (flying with determination to reach a destination)—I can master all these twenty-six gatis.

"Except for Mahadeena, all other gatis have three types: Gata (flying about a target), Agatha (flying to the target and returning to the starting point), and Pratigata (taking off and coming back). Besides these, there are twenty-five Nipatas. I know all these hundred and one

techniques of flight. I can even fly a hundred yojanas in a single step."

The swans, amused by the crow's boastful display, knew that true skill and humility were what mattered most. They began their race, with the swan flying calmly over the sea with a single, steady beat of its wings. The crow, meanwhile, displayed various flight patterns, chattering and insulting the swan all the while. The swan, inwardly smiling, knew who would be victorious.

Deciding to test the crow, the swan flapped its wings and flew faster. The crow tried to keep up, but soon its strength waned. As the sun's heat bore down, the crow grew tired and fell behind. They had flown far over the sea, with water stretching endlessly in every direction. The swan continued to fly effortlessly, but the exhausted crow could go no further. It fell into the water, struggling for breath.

Seeing the crow's plight, the swan turned back. The crow, realizing its mistake and on the brink of death, begged the swan for help. "Please save me," the crow apologized, "I was wrong to be so arrogant."

The swan, compassionate and kind, told the crow not to repeat its mistake. It lifted the crow onto its back and flew

back to the island. The other crows, witnessing this, understood the folly of their arrogance and humbled themselves.

The swans, satisfied with the lesson imparted, flew back to their meadow and disappeared. The story serves as a reminder: The unworthy should not compete with the worthy, and pride should never lead one to humiliate others. This was a story told to Karna by Shalya when he boasted about him being more powerful than Arjuna.

PS: Look at the way our ancestors observed nature, even classifying the flight of birds into so many types. Bhagavān Vyāsa himself documented all these in the Mahabharata. This is why no one but Vyasa could have written such a comprehensive work. The Mahabharata contains everything found elsewhere, and what is not in the Mahabharata is not found anywhere else. It is a monumental work in both importance and volume.

Reference: Karna Parva of Mahābhārata, Chapter 28.

The Lazy Camel

In the Krita Yuga, a camel performed severe penance in the forest, seeking the blessings of Brahma. Pleased with the camel's devotion, Brahma appeared and offered to grant a boon. The delighted camel requested, "Great Lord, please grant me to stretch my neck so I can eat food from a great distance while standing up." Brahma granted the wish, and the camel was overjoyed, believing his penance had been successful.

With its new long neck, the camel never had to move from its spot to eat. It simply stretched its neck to reach food, filling its stomach effortlessly. Content with its boon, the camel stayed in one place, never venturing out.

One day, a fierce storm blew through the forest. Trees swayed, branches broke, and thick clouds darkened the sky. Unable to withstand the storm's fury, the camel sought shelter by stretching its head and neck into a nearby cave. As the storm raged on, heavy rain began to pour.

Seeking refuge from the rain and wind, a frightened fox and his mate rushed into the same cave. Starving and

desperate, the foxes noticed the camel's neck stretched into the cave. Seeing an opportunity to satiate their hunger, they began to gnaw on the camel's neck.

The helpless camel tried to retract its neck, but the narrow confines of the cave made it impossible. The camel endured immense pain as the foxes continued to devour its neck. After the wind and rain subsided, the foxes, their bellies now full, emerged from the cave.

The camel, having endured excruciating pain and unable to escape, succumbed to its injuries and died. Despite its severe penance and the boon granted by Brahma, the camel's life ended in tragedy.

Seeking to fulfill a need is natural. However, over time, desires lead individuals to take detours to satisfy these desires. Vēdavyāsa beautifully illustrates through a metaphor how such pursuits compel one to confront the force of inevitable calamities.

Reference: BORI Shānti Parva of Mahābhārata, Chapter 113.

The Cunning Fox

Dhritarāshtra was deeply troubled and anxious. His worry stemmed from the growing strength of Pāndavās, which far surpassed that of his own children. In his heart, he feared that his sons would be lost in the impending war. Seeking counsel, he called upon Kanika, and expressed his concerns. "What should I do now? What strategy should I follow to ensure success?" he asked.

Kanika, known for his cunning, began to advise Dhritarashtra on the ways of corruption. To illustrate his point, Kanika recounted the story of a cunning fox who seized a hard-earned meal from a group of animals.

Once upon a time in a dense forest, there lived a cunning fox known for his shrewdness and skillful manipulations. He had a group of friends- a tiger, mouse, mongoose and a wolf. They often hunted together and shared their meals.

One day, as they roamed the forest, they spotted a strong and healthy deer grazing. They decided to catch it, but the deer was swift and alert, making it difficult to

capture. As they sat together, pondering their next move, the fox hatched a clever plan.

"Friends, I have an idea," said the fox. "While the deer is sleeping, let our friend the mouse quietly go and bite its leg. The deer will become lame from the pain. Then, the tiger can move in and kill it. After that, we can all enjoy a hearty feast together."

Everyone agreed that the fox's plan was brilliant. They waited for the right moment, and soon enough, they found the deer asleep. The mouse, moving stealthily, gnawed at the deer's leg, causing it to become lame. The injured deer, unable to run, was quickly pounced upon and killed by the tiger. The friends gathered around the dead deer, ready to enjoy their meal.

The fox, always thinking ahead, suggested, "Friends, you've all worked hard for this. Why don't you go and take a bath first? When you return, I'll go and bathe. It's important to refresh ourselves. Then, we can all sit down and enjoy this feast together."

The friends agreed and went off to bathe. The tiger, eager to return to the feast, finished his bath quickly and

came back first. He found the fox sitting there with a worried expression.

"Friend, why do you look so troubled?" asked the tiger.

The fox replied, "While you were away, the mouse said something disrespectful about you. He claimed that you, the king of beasts, lacked the power to catch the deer and that it was by his strength alone that we succeeded. Hearing this, I lost my appetite."

Furious, the tiger growled, "The mouse said that about me? It's good you told me now. I don't want this food that he has tainted. I'll hunt for my own meal." With that, the tiger stormed off into the forest, his pride wounded.

Next, the mouse returned from his bath. The fox greeted him with a worried look and said, "Friend, just now, the mongoose said, 'I don't like this deer meat. Shall I eat a mouse instead? Mouse meat is my favorite.'"

Terrified, the mouse scurried away into his burrow to escape, fearing for his life.

Then the wolf arrived. The fox warned, "Dear friend, the tiger is furious with you and could return at any moment. It's best if you leave now."

Afraid for his safety, the wolf immediately ran off into the forest, not wanting to face the tiger's wrath.

Finally, the mongoose returned. The fox said, "My friends have come, challenged me, and fled. Now, you alone must test my strength. If you defeat me, you can have the meat."

The mongoose, trembling with fear, said, "If even the tiger was defeated by you, what chance do I have? I don't want to fight, nor do I want this meat." The mongoose then hurried away, not wanting any trouble.

With all his friends tricked and gone, the fox laughed to himself and enjoyed the entire deer meat alone, savoring every bite.

Reference: Ādi Parva of Mahābhārata, Chapter 153.

Shāndili

Gālava and Garuda were friends— Gālava was a disciple of Vishwāmitra, and he had a duty to fulfill his Guru Dakshina, both friends were traveling around for this purpose. Garuda was carrying Gālava on his back as they journeyed.

One day, during their travels, they came across the hermitage. Deciding to rest there, they landed and were greeted by an ascetic named Shāndili. She welcomed them warmly, asked about their well-being, and provided them with food. Grateful for her hospitality, the friends enjoyed the meal and then lay down to rest, soon falling into a deep sleep.

After some time, they awoke, ready to continue their journey. However, to their shock, they discovered that Garuda's wings had fallen off. Gālava was equally stunned and saddened by this unexpected misfortune. He pondered the situation, suspecting that such a calamity must be the result of grave wrongdoing.

Gālava understood that evil thoughts bring evil consequences. Garuda shared this belief. He turned to Gālava and said, "Friend, I have had thoughts that go against Dharma. I considered taking this ascetic woman, who is enlightened by her penance, and dedicating her to Brahma, Rudra, or Vishnu. I thought it would be better for her to be with one of them rather than living alone. This wrongful thought is the cause of my misfortune. I will go to her and seek her forgiveness."

With that, Garuda approached Shāndili and bowed to her. "Mother," he said, "I am unsure if the thoughts I had upon seeing you were right or wrong. However, they seem to have been inappropriate. Please save me from this predicament and forgive me."

It is natural to make mistakes, often unknowingly. When such mistakes are realized, they bring regret and the need for apologies. Garuda recognized his error and resolved to be cautious in the future. Shāndili admired Garuda's sincerity and humility. She responded, "Garuda, you will regain your wings. I forgive your evil thoughts. It is this realization and repentance that will lead to your restoration."

"Those who harbor ill thoughts about women will lose all their merit," Shāndili continued. "Sins committed in the mind are also sins, but you were spared because your intention was to carry me for someone else's benefit, not your own. If your thoughts had been selfish, you would have perished immediately. It was Vishnu's grace that saved you."

She then added, "Your wings will be restored. Go and be happy." Grateful for her forgiveness, Garuda and Gālava bowed, taking Shandili's blessings before leaving.

Bhagavān Vyāsa, in Mahābhārata, imparts a vital lesson on the respect due to women through this poignant story. It illustrates how even a fleeting evil thought about a woman can lead to the downfall of the greatest beings. If such is the fate of the mighty, what hope do we have? This tale underscores the need for constant vigilance over our thoughts and actions, emphasizing that respect and purity of mind are paramount. This is the profound moral of the story.

Reference: BORI Udyōga Parva of Mahābhārata, Chapter 111.

Pingala

Once, in a distant town, there lived a beautiful prostitute named Pingala. Her beauty was unparalleled, and many sought her company. However, despite her outward allure, Pingala's heart was heavy with the sorrows of her profession. She often found herself crying in solitude, her heart burdened by the emptiness and pain of her life. In those moments, she tried to console herself, but the comfort was fleeting.

One day, as usual, Pingala prepared herself meticulously. She adorned herself with the finest garments and jewelry, expecting the arrival of a solicitor who had indicated he would meet her in a secret place. It was here that Pingala waited, her heart filled with a mix of anticipation and anxiety.

Hours passed, and the solicitor did not arrive. The once hopeful and excited Pingala began to feel a deep sense of disappointment. As the night wore on, her disappointment turned into distress, and she felt a sense of agitation. She realized that the man she was waiting for, who she believed would bring her joy, had let her down.

In this moment of disappointment and emotional turmoil, Pingala reached a turning point in her life. She began to reflect deeply on her existence, her choices, and the direction her life had taken. This period of introspection led to a significant transformation in her. She became sober, her mind cleared of the illusions that had held her captive for so long, and she freed herself from the addiction to her profession.

As she sat alone in the secret place, Pingala thought to herself, "I have made a grave mistake by not directing all my desires towards the divine. I have always considered my lovers to be my joy and delight, but without realizing it, the true beloved, Nārāyana, who resides within me, was the one I had overlooked."

She continued to reflect, "The men who came to this secret place were not truly dear to me; they were here for their own desires, not for me. They were not charmers; they were deceivers. I mistook their false charm for genuine affection. I made a mistake by not directing all my desires towards the divine."

Pingala's thoughts became more profound as she realized, "Those who came in the guise of charmers can no longer deceive me. By grace of Shrī Hari, I am now awakened and have rid myself of worldly desires. From now on, I will not be a slave to the pleasures of the senses. I will abandon them and find true happiness. This Pingala will no longer be deceived. She will control her desires and immerse herself in the eternal bliss of the divine."

With this firm decision, Pingala resolved to change her life. She devoted herself to meditation and prayer, seeking the divine connection she had long neglected. The separation from her so-called lover had become the catalyst for her enlightenment. In her heart, she realized, "Isn't everything that happens ultimately for the best? All the turmoil in my mind has faded away, and peace has enveloped me. As a result, waves of joy arise in me every day." She no longer felt the need to seek validation or love from others. Instead, she found solace and happiness in her connection with Shrī Krishna. Her heart, once filled with sorrow and emptiness, was now brimming with peace and joy. The wisdom she gained from her experience guided her for the rest of her life.

Pingala's story serves as a powerful reminder that true happiness and fulfillment come from within. It is a testament to the idea that a person can change at any point in their life, no matter how dire the circumstances. Like the darkness that disappears with the rising sun, ignorance and sorrows are dispelled by the light of knowledge and self-awareness.

Reference: BORI Shānti Parva of Mahābhārata, Chapter 138.

Vasishta and Vishwāmitra

In a land known as Kanyākubja, there ruled a renowned king named Gādi. His son, Vishwāmitra, was a powerful and virtuous king whose kingdom was very prosperous.

One day, King Vishwāmitra ventured into the forest with his army for a hunting expedition. After a long day of hunting, both the king and his men were overcome with hunger and thirst. In their search for water, they stumbled upon the āshram of Maharishi Vasishta. They entered the ashram and were warmly welcomed by the sage.

Maharishi Vasishta, known for his hospitality, decided to treat his guests to a feast. He worshipped Nandini, the daughter of the divine cow Kāmadhēnu, and prayed for her to provide a sumptuous meal for the guests. Nandini, who was always devoted to Vasishta, granted his wish. A variety of drinks and delicacies were prepared. Clothes and gems were also given as offerings. Vasishta ensured that the king and his retinue were well-fed and content.

Astonished by the unprecedented hospitality, Vishwāmitra thought, "How can a sage in the forest treat our vast army with just the help of a cow?" He gazed at Nandini in wonder and desired to possess her. He approached Vasishta and said, "Maharshi! Will you accept ten crore cows or my kingdom in exchange for this cow?"

Vasishta replied, "King! This cow is the property of Devatās, and they have entrusted her to me. Therefore, I cannot give her away."

Vishwāmitra persisted, "Maharshi! Shouldn't the best things be with the king? I have the authority to take this cow. If you don't give it willingly, I will take it by force." Vasishta calmly responded, "O King! It is true you have power and an army. Do as you please."

Determined to take Nandini, Vishwāmitra's soldiers began to drag her away. Enraged, Nandini's eyes turned red, and her hair stood on end. She created thousands of soldiers from her body, who fell upon Vishwāmitra's army with mighty force, driving them away. Vishwāmitra, left alone and humiliated, unleashed a shower of arrows at Vasishta. However, Vasishta, with his Brahma Danda, effortlessly neutralized the arrows.

The king was deeply humiliated and astonished by the power of Vasishta's tapasya. In comparison, he felt his own power was insignificant.

धिग्बलं क्षत्रियबलं ब्रह्मतेजोबलं बलम् ।
बलाबलं विनिश्चित्य तप एव परं बलम् ॥

He realized that nothing could surpass the divine radiance, Brahmatejas, which Vasishta possessed through his spiritual austerity. Vishwāmitra concluded that the source of Brahmatejas was tapasya, and he resolved to pursue it with unwavering determination.

Abandoning his kingdom and all its pleasures, Vishwāmitra dedicated himself to severe austerities. Immersed in deep meditation, he discovered the powerful Gāyatri Mahāmantra, which further enhanced his spiritual journey. With immense dedication and the grace of Shrī Hari, Vishwāmitra, once a mighty king, transformed into a revered Brahmarshi. His journey from royalty to sagehood exemplified the triumph of spiritual strength over worldly power, marking his legacy as one of the greatest sages in history.

Reference: BORI Ādi Parva of Mahābhārata, Chapter 165.

Kāmadhēnu

Once, in the royal court of Hastināpura, Bhagavān Vyāsa sat with the king Dhritarāshtra. The atmosphere was heavy with unspoken emotions and concerns about the kingdom's future. Dhritarashtra began, "I know you hold all of us—me, Pāndu, and Vidura—in equal regard. But it seems you have a special affection for the Pāndavās. Why is that so?"

To which Bhagavān Vyāsa narrated the story of Kāmadhēnu and Indra. Once, in Swargaloka, Indra sat upon his throne, presiding over an assembly of Dēvatās. Kāmadhēnu approached Indra with tears streaming down her face.

Seeing Kāmadhēnu's sorrow, Indra's heart filled with compassion. "Mother," he asked gently, "why do you cry? Is everything well in the world?"

Kāmadhēnu, her voice trembling with emotion, replied, "Devēndra, it is not for myself that I weep, but for my son. On Earth, I see him malnourished, tied to a plow, and

beaten with a whip. He is weak and suffering, burdened with heavy labor beyond his strength."

Indra, curious and concerned, asked, "You have many children, Should you not love them all equally? Why do you have such special affection for this particular son?"

Kāmadhēnu responded, "O Indra, it is true that I love all my children equally. However, it is natural for a mother to feel a deeper compassion for the child who is suffering the most. My other children are well, but this one endures great hardship, and it breaks my heart to see him in such pain."

Moved by her words, Indra decided to ease the burden of the suffering ox. He sent rains to soften the ground, making the plowing easier and less painful.

Vyāsa looked at the troubled king with compassionate eyes. "Dhritarāshtra, it is true that I see you, Pāndu, and Vidura as equals. My love for you all is the same. But consider the trials the Pāndavās have faced. They were forced into exile, stripped of their kingdom and comforts. Yet, through all their hardships, they remained truthful and pious. Their unwavering righteousness amidst suffering draws my deeper affection."

Dhritarāshtra nodded slowly, understanding the weight of Vyāsa's words. He realized that it was not favoritism but a recognition of the Pāndavās' resilience and virtue that earned them Vyāsa's special regard and the importance of truth and piety, even in the face of adversity.

Reference: BORI Vana Parva of Mahābhārata, Chapter 10.

Shankha and Likhita

Once upon a time, there were two brothers named Shankha and Likhita, known for their piety and spirituality. They lived on the banks of the serene river, each having their own ashram nestled side by side. These ashrams were as beautiful as Nandanavana, filled with a variety of plants and trees, rich with fruits and flowers.

One day, Likhita decided to visit the ashram of his elder brother, Shankha. Upon arriving, he found that Shankha was not present. As he wandered through the beautiful ashram, he noticed well-ripened fruits hanging from the trees. Unable to resist the temptation, he plucked a few fruits and ate one or two.

Just as he was savoring the fruits, Shankha returned to the ashram. Seeing Likhita eating the fruits, Shankha asked, "Likhita, where did you get those fruits?"

Likhita, with the innocence and familiarity of brotherhood, stepped forward, bowed to Shankha, and replied, "Brother, I picked these fruits here from your ashram."

Shankha's face hardened with anger. "Likhita! You have eaten the fruits from this ashram without asking for permission. This is theft. You must go to King Sudyumna and confess your crime. Accept whatever punishment he deems appropriate and then return."

Likhita made his way to see King Sudyumna, as instructed by his elder brother, Shankha. Upon his arrival, the gatekeeper promptly informed the king about Likhita's visit. The king, along with his ministers, immediately went to meet Likhita and greeted him respectfully.

"Dharmatman," the king addressed him, "what brings you here from such a distance? Please, know that I am at your service."

Likhita, with a composed demeanor, replied, "King, you have promised to fulfill my request, so please listen carefully. I do not seek anything material from you. I plucked and ate a couple of fruits in my elder brother's ashram without his permission. This constitutes theft. Therefore, I request that you punish me as a thief."

King Sudyumna, struck by Likhita's adherence to dharma, said, "Brahmanottama, if I have the authority to punish you, then know that I myself grant you permission to eat the fruits. You are innocent in my eyes. If you have any other requests or needs, please let me know."

Likhita remained steadfast in his demand for rightful punishment according to dharma. Seeing his resolve, King Sudyumna had no choice but to carry out the punishment for theft: he ordered that both of Likhita's hands be cut off.

Likhita, now handless, returned to his brother's ashram. As he approached Shankha, he said, "I have received the punishment for my mistake. Now, please forgive me."

Shankha embraced his brother with great affection and said, "I have no grudge against you. You have upheld dharma, and our clan remains pure. You are a true adherent of righteousness."

He instructed Likhita to take bath in river Bahudā. As soon as Likhita bathed in the holy waters, he found that his hands had been restored. He rushed back to his brother,

exclaiming, "My hands have been restored! This is the glory of your penance."

Shankha smiled and replied, "Indeed, it is the power of my penance. But, my dear brother, had I used my penance to absolve you before your punishment, neither you nor King Sudyumna would have been purified. The punishment was your destiny and a necessary part of maintaining dharma. Now, you are cleansed of your transgression, and King Sudyumna has proven his impartiality and commitment to justice. Both of you have emerged purified."

Reference: BORI Shānti Parva of Mahābhārata, Chapter 24.

Baka and Bhīmasēna

In the town of Ēkachakra, the very mention of the name "Baka" sent shivers down the spines of its residents. Baka was no ordinary threat; he was a fearsome cannibal who had terrorized the town for many years. The local king, unable or unwilling to protect his people, had struck a grim bargain with the demon: instead of tormenting the entire town, Baka would be appeased by a single human sacrifice, sent to him by the townspeople.

In this very town, the Pāṇḍavas, who were in exile and disguised as Brahmins, had taken refuge in a humble Brahmin's house. They survived by begging for alms, blending in with the townspeople. One day, Bhīmasēna heard the unmistakable sound of sorrow coming from within the Brahmin's household—the very family that had offered them shelter.

Concerned, Bhīmasēna asked his mother, Kuntīdēvī, "I hear the sounds of weeping from the Brahmin's house. Something is clearly wrong. We must find out the reason and see if we can help. But if I go, the women of the house might

feel uncomfortable or shy. It would be better if you went to inquire."

Kuntīdēvī approached the Brahmin's house and stood quietly by the side of the house, listening intently to the conversation taking place within. Her heart grew heavy as she heard the Brahmin's sorrowful voice, full of despair and resignation.

"My life has become a never-ending tragedy," the Brahmin lamented. "We should have left this cursed city when we had the chance, but now we are trapped. How can I possibly choose one of you to sacrifice to that dreadful demon? My wife is my god-given companion, my partner in life. How could I ever let her go? And my daughter, so young and full of promise, destined to bring light into another home—how could I sacrifice her? As for our son, he is the future, the one who should grow up strong and live to fulfill his destiny. It is unnatural for a child to die before his parents; it is we who should pass first."

He paused, his voice breaking with emotion. "If we lose even one member of our family, our lives will be like a ship lost in a storm, broken and adrift. No, it would be better if we all went together and faced the demon, ending our suffering

as one, rather than living with the unbearable pain of losing a loved one."

The wife spoke with deep resolve. "He who is born must die someday," she began. "But you, my husband, must live. For the sake of our family, I am willing to lay down my life. Without you, who will care for our children? I will die, sacrificing myself so that you and our family can survive."

Her words were met with a chorus of sobs, but then the daughter spoke up, "Father, one day I will have to leave you all and go to my husband's home. If it is not today, it will be another day. So consider this my final duty as your daughter, I will go to the demon. Is it not the duty of a child to relieve the sorrow of her parents? Let me take this burden from you."

Tears flowed freely as the family grappled with the unbearable decision they faced. But then, the youngest son stepped forward. Holding a stick of grass like a weapon, "Don't worry, Mother. I will fight the demon with this stick and end our misery."

As the family sat in their sorrow, a faint smile appeared on their faces despite the deep grief that had

weighed them down. Kuntīdēvī, who had been observing them patiently, knew that when grief is too overwhelming, people often struggle to articulate its cause. Understanding this, she gently approached the Brahmin and inquired about the source of their anguish.

The Brahmin, with a heavy heart, began to explain. "There is a demon named Baka who has been terrorizing this town for many years. The king, unable to protect us, struck a deal with the demon. Instead of attacking us all, Baka demanded that we send him one person each time he is hungry. Today, it is our family's turn to make this terrible sacrifice. That is why we are so distraught."

Kuntīdēvī listened intently, and after hearing the Brahmin's plight, she spoke with calm assurance. "Brahmanōttama, please do not despair. I have five sons, each one strong and capable. I will send the mightiest of them to face this demon in place of your family."

The Brahmin was taken aback by Kuntīdēvī's offer. He replied with a firm resolve, "Mother, I cannot in good conscience allow another to die in place of my family. It would be wrong to save ourselves at the expense of another's life."

Moved by her insistence and reassured by her confidence, the Brahmin reluctantly agreed. Kuntīdēvī returned home and recounted the entire situation to Bhīmasēna, who listened with a smile. He was eager to face the demon and relieve the family of their sorrow, ready to show his strength and protect the innocent. Dharmarāja, had just returned from his daily alms collection. Noticing the unusual happiness on Bhīmasēna's face, he became curious and asked Kuntīdēvī about him, after explaining the entire situation to Dharmarāja. She recounted how she had offered Bhīmasēna to take the place of the Brahmin's family, to face the demon Baka and save them from their plight.

Upon hearing this, Dharmarāja's expression changed from curiosity to concern. He immediately protested out of love and responsibility, "Mother, it is not right to send Bhīmasēna into such danger! How could you agree to such a perilous venture without discussing it with us first? We are a family, and we should face challenges together, not send one of us alone into such calamities."

Kuntīdēvī, with the calmness and wisdom that had guided her through many hardships, responded gently, "My son, I understand your concern. But you must trust in

Bhīmasēna's strength and courage. He is more than capable of handling this challenge. Our purpose in this life, especially in our current circumstances, is to protect those who cannot protect themselves. Bhīmasēna's strength is a gift, and it must be used for the greater good. This is the duty of a Kshatriya, and Bhīmasēna is ready to fulfill it."

The next day, as dawn broke, Bhīmasēna was ready to face the demon Baka. Kuntīdēvī and his brothers watched as he set off, riding in a large cart filled with a variety of food. Bhīmasēna drove the cart confidently, As he moved along the path, he noticed the grim sight of human bones scattered by the roadside, the remnants of those unfortunate souls who had fallen victim to Baka's insatiable hunger. Bhīmasēna's resolve only strengthened as he approached the lair of the monstrous demon.

When he reached a short distance from Baka's cave, Bhīmasēna stopped the cart. Instead of preparing for battle, he calmly began to unpack the food. Without a hint of fear, he started eating the sumptuous meal meant for the demon, savoring each bite as if he were in the comfort of his own home.

Meanwhile, deep within his cave, Baka stirred. He had been waiting impatiently for his promised meal, but the delay had left him in a foul mood. As the minutes passed and his anger grew, he finally could wait no longer. With a roar, Baka burst out of his cave, his monstrous form looming large as he stomped towards the source of his delayed feast.

When Baka saw Bhīmasēna calmly sitting by the cart, eating the food that was supposed to be his, the demon's fury knew no bounds. He bellowed in rage, the ground trembling beneath his massive feet as he charged toward Bhima with the intent to crush him. But Bhīmasēna, utterly unfazed, continued to eat, barely acknowledging the demon's presence.

Baka, now towering over Bhīmasēna, shouted at him in anger, demanding that he stop eating and prepare to be devoured. But Bhīmasēna, with an air of indifference, finished the last morsel of food, wiped his hands, and performed Āchamana to purify himself, preparing both his body and mind for the battle that lay ahead. With a calm yet determined resolve, Bhīmasēna rose to face the monstrous Bakasura.

The demon Baka, sensing that his meal was not only stolen but that his authority was being challenged, lunged at Bhīmasēna with a roar. The earth trembled beneath his massive form, and the sky seemed to darken as his anger grew. Despite Baka's terrifying appearance and overwhelming size, Bhima remained unfazed, his eyes locked on the demon as he prepared to engage in combat.

The battle between Bhīmasēna and Bakāsura began, and though Baka was formidable, his strength paled in comparison to that of Bhima. However, Bhīmasēna, being the warrior he was, did not aim to end the fight quickly. Instead, he drew out the battle, allowing Baka to unleash his full fury. With each clash, the ground shook, and the air filled with the sounds of their struggle.

Bhīmasēna skillfully dodged and parried each of Baka's attacks, all the while testing the demon's strength and endurance. The fight raged on, but as time passed, it became clear that Baka was no match for Bhīmasēna's immense power. Despite this, Bhīmasēna did not immediately kill the demon. He wanted to make sure Baka felt the full weight of his own cruelty and terror.

Finally Bhīmasēna decided it was time to end Bakāsura's reign of terror once and for all, Bhīmasēna took a moment to remember the lotus feet of Shrī Krishna. With renewed energy and focus, Bhima grabbed hold of Baka's massive foot. With a powerful twist, he lifted the demon off the ground and violently slammed him down with such force that the earth seemed to crack beneath them.

Bakāsura's lifeless body lay still, the terror that once gripped Ēkachakra now gone. Bhīmasēna, to ensure the villagers knew of their newfound freedom, took Baka's massive body and hung it from the doorway of the town. The sight of the fallen demon sent a clear message to all who saw it.

As the people of Ēkachakra saw the body of the dreaded demon hanging from the gate, a wave of relief and joy swept through the town. The citizens, who had lived in fear for so long, now felt the heavy burden of terror lifted from their hearts. They rushed to find Bhīmasēna, showering him with praise and gratitude for his incredible bravery.

The town's people gathered around Bhīmasēna, celebrating the end of their suffering. They congratulated him, their eyes filled with admiration and thanks. With Baka

gone, they knew that the dark days were over, and a new era of peace and safety had begun.

Reference: BORI Ādi Parva of Mahābhārata,
Chapters 143-152.

Yavakrīta

Yavakrīta was a young man driven by an intense desire to learn the Vēdas, but his aspiration was unusual—he wanted to gain this sacred knowledge without the guidance of a Guru. Despite the advice and reasoning offered by those around him, Yavakrīta remained steadfast in his determination. His ambition was so strong that he even rejected the counsel of Indra, who tried to dissuade him from his reckless pursuit. But Yavakrīta's mind was made up, and his penance continued with unwavering focus.

Seeing that Yavakrīta's determination was not swayed by reason, Indra decided to teach him a lesson in a different way. He devised a plan to impart wisdom to the young aspirant, but through an example that would be impossible to ignore.

One day, as Yavakrīta performed his daily Sandhyā Vandana by the river, he noticed a very old man meticulously piling up sand near the shore. Intrigued by the strange sight, Yavakrīta grew curious about the old man's actions.

Yavakrīta approached the old man and asked, "Old man, your body is frail with age, yet here you are laboring. What is the purpose of this work?"

The old man responded, "Even in the twilight of life, one must strive to perform good deeds. I am building a bridge with sand, hoping to do something beneficial for the next generation."

Yavakrīta couldn't help but burst into laughter. "Old man, it seems madness has taken hold of you. How can anyone build a bridge out of sand?"

The old man immediately replied, "Why shouldn't it be possible? After all, if you can seek to learn the Vedas without a teacher, why can't I build a bridge from sand?"

Yavakrīta was taken aback and felt a sense of shame. Still, he pressed on, recognizing Indra in the old man's form. "Indra, why shouldn't one seek knowledge without a teacher?" he questioned.

Indra gently responded, "Child, just as a bridge made of bricks and stones stands strong and enduring, so too is the knowledge gained through the virtues of serving a Guru.

Sand alone cannot form a bridge, for it lacks the necessary foundation. Similarly, to build a solid bridge of learning, one must have the closeness and grace of the Guru."

But Yavakrīta, stubborn in his desire, persisted. "Your words may hold truth, but still, I ask that you grant me the knowledge of the Vedas without a Guru."

Seeing Yavakrīta's determination, Indra warned, "Learning without a teacher is fraught with peril. You will understand the dangers in due time." Despite his caution, Indra granted Yavakrīta the knowledge he sought.

Yavakrīta, having acquired knowledge effortlessly, became arrogant. His pride led him to commit the grave offense of misbehaving with Raibhya's daughter-in-law. Infuriated by this crime, Raibhya used his penance to create a menacing spirit, to destroy Yavakrīta.

One day, Yavakrīta found himself in an impure state when the ghoul, lying in wait, began to chase him. Desperate, Yavakrīta rushed to the Yajnashālā of his Āshram, intending to destroy the demon with the sanctified water from his Kamandalu. However, fate intervened when the blind servant of Yavakrīta's father, unaware of the

situation, refused to let him enter without proper identification.

Helpless and defenseless, Yavakrīta lost his power, and the ghoul closed in, devouring him. Thus ended the tragic tale of a student who sought knowledge without the guidance of a Guru— Bhagavān Vyāsa teaches a powerful lesson for all of us about the importance of humility, discipline, and the irreplaceable role of a teacher in the pursuit of true wisdom.

Reference: BORI Vana Parva of Mahābhārata, Chapters 135-140.

The Hunter and the Birds

Long ago, there lived a man who made his living by catching birds and selling them in the town. Each day, he would spread his net on the ground, placing nuts as bait to lure the unsuspecting birds. One day, a flock of birds, tempted by the sight of the nuts, landed on the ground and got caught in his trap.

The man, seeing his prey ensnared, hurried towards the net, eager to collect the birds. The birds, sensing danger, united in their efforts. Together, they lifted the net into the air and began flying towards the sky, carrying the trap with them.

Determined not to lose his catch, the man chased after the birds on the ground, watching in disbelief as they soared higher, taking the net further from his reach. As he ran, a wise sage, witnessing this unusual spectacle, curious about the man's futile chase, called out to him, "Why are you running after birds that are soaring so high in the sky? Do you truly believe you'll be able to catch them?"

The man, still running and out of breath, replied, "Just wait a little while, sir. Soon enough, the birds will start arguing about which direction to fly. Once they begin fighting amongst themselves, they'll lose focus, and that's when I can easily catch them."

Just as the man predicted, the birds suddenly started to argue. The seeds of disagreement quickly sprouted into confusion, as is often the case when conflicts arise. Two birds, in particular, began quarreling about which direction to fly. Each pulled in opposite directions, neither willing to compromise, and soon, they both tumbled down to the ground.

The man, watching closely, quickly gathered the fallen birds, counted them with satisfaction, and headed off to the town to sell them. The sage, observing this, mused to himself, "A fight between two often benefits the third."

Reference: BORI Udyōga Parva of Mahābhārata, Chapter 62.

Power of Humility

After the great Mahābhārata war, as Bhīshma rested on his bed of arrows, Dharmarāja approached him with numerous questions on Dharma, Artha, Kāma, and Mōksha. Among these, Dharmarāja posed a question on politics: "How can one subdue a powerful enemy?"

Bhīshma answered with a story. The great Ocean, the husband of all rivers, was filled with joy when rivers rushed toward him from far and wide, eager to unite with him. One day, as he watched the rivers arrive with their powerful currents, uprooting massive trees and carrying them along, the Ocean grew curious.

He called out to the rivers and asked, "O mighty rivers, you come to me with such enthusiasm, tearing up the largest trees from your banks and bringing them to me. But I've noticed something strange – no matter how strong your floods are, you never bring the small saplings. Why is that? Do you consider them worthless? Do you admire them? Or is there some hidden fear that keeps you from touching them? I wish to know the reason."

River Mandākini, gently responded to the Ocean's question. "My dear, there is a deep reason behind this. The great trees you see along our banks stand tall and proud. They are rooted in arrogance, refusing to bend or bow before our floods. So, we uproot them and carry them away, for their pride makes them vulnerable."

"But the saplings are different. Even though they grow abundantly along our shores, they understand the power of the flood. When our waters rise, they bend low, showing humility. Once the flood subsides, they stand tall again, unharmed. These saplings know how to adapt to the changing forces of nature and time. They bend when needed and rise when it's safe. Because of their humility, we do not harm them."

Bhīshma then added a final lesson: "Just like these saplings, one must learn to endure the strength of an enemy by showing humility. Those who fail to bend, like the mighty trees, will be uprooted and destroyed."

Reference: BORI Shānti Parva of Mahābhārata, Chapter 114.

Alarka

In ancient times, there was a king named Alarka. He was a wise and just ruler, beloved by his people. Along with being a great administrator, he was deeply knowledgeable in the scriptures and a sincere spiritual seeker. One day, he set out on a journey to find a serene place for meditation. After reaching the summit of a hill, he decided to devote himself to spiritual contemplation. Sitting beneath a large tree, he reflected:

"My mind is the root of all the challenges I face. It is only because of its turmoil that I am unable to realize Paramātma. To overcome this, I must conquer the mind. But the mind is constantly surrounded by its allies—the senses. All this time, I have been battling the external enemies. Now, I will direct my efforts inward and aim the arrow at the mind itself."

Then the mind spoke to Alarka, "Your arrows cannot harm me. If you seek to conquer me, you must find the arrows that strike from within."

Alarka turned inward once more, He reasoned, "The nose brings forth the desire for fragrances, tempting me with their allure. If I sever the nose, perhaps the desires will cease."

But the nose responded, "Alarka, your arrows cannot touch me. Seek out other means if you wish to pierce me."

Undeterred, Alarka reflected further. "The tongue craves only what is delicious, and we bend to its whims. If I cut off the tongue, perhaps it will be satisfied."

Yet, the tongue replied, "Alarka, your arrows will not reach me. Look within for the arrows that can."

Alarka reflected further, "The skin craves soft and pleasant sensations. It boasts of its desires. Therefore, I will tear the skin apart."

But the skin responded, "Alarka, your arrows cannot pierce me. You must find different arrows if you wish to conquer me."

Continuing his contemplation, Alarka thought, "The ear longs for beautiful sounds, shattering silence and filling

the mind with impurities. To end this, I will gladly pierce the ears that desire such sounds."

Yet the ear replied, "Alarka, your arrows cannot harm me. There are other arrows for that purpose."

Alarka then turned his thoughts to the eyes. "The eyes seek out beauty, drawing us toward things that please them. I will gladly cut out these eyes that chase such illusions."

But the eyes said, "Alarka, your arrows cannot reach me. Find other arrows to strike me."

With this, Alarka delved even deeper into his thoughts, searching for the real means to conquer his inner desires, "All the problems I face stem directly from my mind. The senses desire things only because the mind controls them. The mind is the root cause of attachment—whether it's the thirst for honor, intolerance of shame, urge for material possessions or even revenge. Simply trying to destroy the senses won't work; they are just the channels of the mind's desires."

Then, the mind spoke once again, "Alarka, I cannot be pierced by these arrows. There are special arrows that can reach me."

Upon hearing this, Alarka set forth on a path of intense penance, searching for the arrows that could truly conquer the senses. After much effort, he discovered the single arrow capable of striking down all his desires: the arrow of Yoga. By harnessing the power of Yoga, Alarka realized, one could master the mind and, in turn, subdue all the senses.

Reference: BORI Āshwamēdhika Parva of Mahābhārata, Chapter 30.

Marutta

Long ago, there was a king named Marutta, who was deeply spiritual and philosophical in nature. He desired to perform the Ashwamēdha Yajna, a grand ritual that requires the guidance of learned priests. Marutta approached Brihaspati, the revered preceptor of the gods, to officiate as his chief priest.

When Indra learned of this, he immediately intervened and said to Brihaspati, "You are the priest of the divine beings, a position of immense honor and prestige. Do not diminish your stature by serving as a priest for mere mortals." Brihaspati pondered over Indra's words, and he hesitated to take part in the Yajna. This left Marutta feeling disheartened and desperate. As he was returning, he happened to meet Devarshi Nārada.

Nārada consoled him, saying, "King Marutta, don't lose hope. If Brihaspati has refused, you can seek the guidance of his younger brother, Samvarta. He is an Avadhūta, detached from worldly affairs. If you can convince him, your Yajna will be successful. Remember, Avadhūtas are not easily persuaded, so you must approach him with

immense patience and perseverance. Only with great effort will you succeed in bringing him to officiate your Yajna."

King Marutta, filled with joy and hope, respectfully bowed to Nārada and set off to follow his guidance. However, before agreeing to be the priest, Samvarta tested Marutta's patience, devotion, and determination in various ways. The King, undeterred by these trials, demonstrated his worthiness to undertake the sacred Yajna. Impressed by the King's unwavering resolve, Samvarta agreed to preside over the ritual.

Under Samvarta's guidance, preparations for the grand Ashwamēdha Yajna began with great enthusiasm. The chosen site for this monumental event was the sacred Mūjavān Parvata. With great reverence, Marutta sought and received the blessings and huge wealth from Shiva to conduct the Yajna at this auspicious place.

Hearing that Samvarta had agreed to conduct the Yajna for King Marutta, Brihaspati became deeply troubled. Indra, noticing Brihaspati's discontent, decided to intervene. He called upon Agni and instructed him to deliver a message to Marutta, hoping to resolve the tension. Agni

descended to Marutta's court as Indra's emissary and conveyed the message.

"King Marutta, Samvarta is not a suitable priest for this Yajna. Brihaspati has now agreed to preside over your Yajna. This is Indra's command," Agni declared.

Unfazed, Marutta responded with resolve, "Indra's orders cannot be followed in this matter. Why should Brihaspati lower himself to become a priest for a mortal like me? It is not appropriate. I have already chosen Samvarta as my priest."

Seeing that the King remained steadfast, Agni tried to persuade him again, "Rajan, if you appoint Brihaspati as your priest, both the earthly and heavenly riches will be yours. Consider this carefully."

But Marutta stood firm in his decision. Before Agni could continue, Samvarta intervened. "Agni, we are starting this Yajna on our own. We do not fear Indra's commands. Let Indra do what he wishes."

Agni, apprehensive of opposing such determination, realized that his negotiation had failed. He departed for the

heavens, unable to sway Marutta's resolve. Indra, still intent on changing King Marutta's mind, decided to send a stronger message. This time, he sent King of Gandharvas Dhritarāshtra to deliver the warning.

Appearing in Marutta's court, Dhritarāshtra spoke with a stern tone, "Rajan, I am Dhritarāshtra, the messenger of Indra. Indra commands that you make Brihaspati your priest. This is your final chance. If you refuse again, Indra himself will bring destruction upon you and everything you hold dear."

The threat hung heavy in the air, leaving everyone in the court tense and anxious. But Marutta, true to his resolve, did not waver. Despite the warnings, King Marutta stood firm in his belief in Samvarta and his decision to have him as his priest. Even when Indra descended himself, prepared to unleash his wrath upon the king, Samvarta's influence over the situation was so powerful that Indra was pacified and ended up participating in the Yajna as a guest.

Marutta, seeing this change, worshipped Indra with great joy and devotion. So profound was his reverence and the manner in which the Yajna was conducted, that even the mighty Indra was moved by Marutta's sincere devotion. The

Yajna was performed in an unprecedented manner, one that set a standard for ages to come.

The Vedas themselves sing the glory of this grand yajna, immortalizing its significance and splendor for all time.

तदप्येषः श्लोकोऽभिगीतो।
मरुतः परिवेष्टारो मरुत्तस्यावसन् गृहे।
आविक्षितस्य कामप्रेर्विश्वे देवाः सभासद इति ॥

Reference: BORI Āshwamēdhika Parva of Mahābhārata, Chapter 4.

Kundadhāra

When Yudhishthira approached Bhīshma Pitāmaha, who was lying on the bed of arrows after the great Mahābhārata war, he posed many questions seeking wisdom.

"Dharma, Artha, and Kāma are the three Purusharthas advocated in Shāstras. Among these, which is the most beneficial?" he asked.

To answer this, Bhīshma narrated a story:

Long ago, there was a poor Brāhmin who was deeply interested in acquiring Artha and enjoying Kāma. He dreamt of accumulating good wealth, but despite his relentless efforts, he couldn't earn even the bare minimum for his survival. Exhausted and frustrated, he wondered, "Which Dēvata should I worship? Who will bless me with prosperity?"

During his quest for an answer, he had a vision of a Mēgha Pusrusha(Servant of Dēvatās) named Kundadhāra. Filled with devotion and hope, the Brāhmin believed that

Kundadhāra could bless him with wealth and turn his fortunes around.

Pleased by the Brāhmin's devotion, Kundadhāra decided to grant him a boon. However, instead of bestowing material wealth, Kundadhāra prayed to the Dēvatās to transform the Brāhmin's mind and help him stay firmly rooted in Dharma.

When the Brāhmin realized this, he was deeply disappointed. He thought to himself, "Kundadhāra could have prayed for me to receive enormous wealth, yet he chose to change my mindset instead! Why didn't he bless me with riches that I so desperately sought?"

Frustrated by his situation, the Brāhmin left for the forest and began meditating, surviving only on fruits that fell naturally from the trees, ensuring he caused no harm to any living being. Over time, his mind became anchored in Dharma. His dedication grew so intense that he eventually subsisted only on leaves, and later, on nothing but water. Years of such rigorous penance strengthened his resolve and spiritual power.

One day, he discovered that whatever he spoke would come true. Astonished by his newfound abilities, he began to contemplate the source of these superpowers. It was then that Kundadhara reappeared before him.

"Oh Brāhmin, you have gained clairvoyance," Kundadhāra said. "Use this power and see for yourself the fate of wealthy kings and others who were relentlessly behind money all the time."

Obeying Kundadhāra, the Brāhmin observed the destiny of many kings who, driven by their insatiable desire for wealth, were suffering in the depths of hell. Kundadhāra continued, "Now, look at those who have pursued wealth through unrighteous means."

The Brāhmin did so, witnessing the torment of those who had been consumed by greed and immoral pursuits.

"If I had asked the Dēvatās to bless you with wealth," Kundadhāra explained, "you might have ended up in a similar state. Out of compassion for the devotion you've shown, I requested the Dēvatās to bestow you with wisdom instead, freeing you from the obsession of earning and accumulating riches. Even now, if you still desire material

wealth, I can grant you a kingdom and untold treasures. But consider carefully the consequences that follow."

The Brāhmin, filled with remorse, replied, "That day, I was deeply hurt when you didn't ask the gods to grant me wealth. I didn't understand the depth of your kindness and foresight. Will you forgive me for my ignorance?"

Kundadhāra, moved by the Brāhmin's humility and understanding, spoke to him warmly. "Your realization itself is a blessing," he said. "Dharma is indeed supreme. Only the Artha and Kāma pursued through the path of Dharma can protect us from falling into the depths of suffering and hell."

With these words, Bhīshma concluded his lesson to Yudhishthira, emphasizing the primacy of Dharma over the other pursuits of life.

Reference: BORI Shānti Parva of Mahābhārata, Chapter 163.

Shala and Vāmadēva

Once upon a time, there was a powerful king named Shala, from the noble Ikshvāku dynasty. One day, while hunting in the forest, Shala spotted a deer that moved with astonishing speed, faster than any animal he had ever seen. Determined to capture the deer, Shala urged his charioteer to drive faster. "Make haste! We must not lose this deer!" he commanded.

The charioteer, seeing the deer was far too swift, hesitated and said, "My lord, even the legendary horses of Sage Vāmadēva would struggle to keep up with such a creature."

Intrigued, Shala asked, "Tell me, what makes Vāmadēva's horses so special?"

Caught between his fear of Vāmadēva's wrath and the king's order, the charioteer replied cautiously, "These horses, my lord, are as swift as the very thoughts of the mind."

This piqued the king's curiosity, and he immediately ordered, "Take me to Vāmadēva's ashram. I must have those horses."

Upon reaching the sage's hermitage, Shala dismounted and approached Vāmadēva, bowing respectfully. "O revered sage, I have been chasing a deer with extraordinary speed, but my horses are too slow. Will you kindly lend me your divine horses to continue my pursuit?"

Vāmadēva, being a sage of great compassion, agreed and said, "King Shala, you may take my horses, but once you have caught the deer, return them to me."

Grateful, Shala took the magnificent horses, and with their unmatched speed, he soon captured the elusive deer. However, overcome by greed and the thrill of victory, Shala decided not to return the horses. Instead, he brought them back to his palace, thinking, Why should such powerful horses belong to a Brāhmin when they could serve a king like me?

Meanwhile, noticing his horses had not been returned, Vāmadēva sent his disciple to remind the king of

his promise. The disciple approached Shala and said, "O king, I come as a messenger of my Guru, Sage Vāmadēva. He kindly asks that you return the horses you borrowed."

But Shala, now filled with arrogance, dismissed the request with a wave of his hand. "Tell your Guru that horses belong to warriors, not Brāhmins. I will not return them. If Vāmadēva needs oxen for his ashram, I will gladly send him the finest ones. But horses are for kings."

The disciple, dismayed, returned to Vāmadēva and relayed the king's message. Furious at Shala's betrayal, the sage himself went to confront the king. Standing in the royal court, Vāmadēva thundered, "O King Shala, a man of honor always keeps his word. To take something and refuse to return it is the act of a thief. Do not bring dishonor upon yourself!"

But Shala, still blinded by pride, retorted, "A Brahmin has no use for horses. You are meant to chant the Vedas and lead a simple life. I will not return these horses, no matter what you say."

Vāmadēva, realizing that reason had no effect on the arrogant king, finally cursed him. "For your greed and dishonesty, demons will come to claim your life."

Yet even this warning did not shake Shala's resolve. Laughing, he said, "I am not afraid of your curses, Brāhmin. Even if the whole world turns against me, I will not give back the horses!"

But the sage's curse soon came to pass. Demons, summoned by Vāmadēva's words, descended upon the kingdom, and Shala, despite his power and arrogance, was helpless against them. They took his life, and the once-proud king met a tragic end.

Thus, the story of Shala and Vāmadēva serves as a timeless reminder: no matter how great one's power, breaking a promise and acting with arrogance will lead to ruin. What is borrowed must be returned, and honoring one's word is the true mark of nobility.

Reference: BORI Vana Parva of Mahābhārata, Chapter 190.

Friendship and Enmity

In a vast forest, a grand banyan tree stood tall, its branches sprawling wide, offering shelter to all kinds of animals and birds. One of its residents was a sharp-witted mouse named Palita, who had made a snug burrow at the foot of the tree. Also prowling the forest was Lomasha, a menacing cat who regularly preyed on the smaller creatures of the woods.

One evening, a hunter wandered into the forest and set a trap near the banyan tree, hoping to snare some unsuspecting prey. Lomasha, in pursuit of his own prey, got caught in the hunter's trap. Palita, seeing his sworn enemy trapped, felt a rush of triumph. Feeling emboldened, Palita danced around Lomasha, gleefully mocking the cat's predicament.

However, just as Palita was enjoying his newfound sense of victory, he spotted something terrifying. A mongoose named Harita, with its sharp red eyes and lightning speed, was watching him from a distance, ready to strike. And if that wasn't bad enough, perched on a branch above him was a hungry owl named Chandraka, its sharp

beak gleaming in the moonlight, preparing to swoop down on him.

Palita's joy turned into sheer panic. With death lurking in every direction, the mouse realized that his only hope of survival lay in the one creature he had always feared – Lomasha. Though they were enemies, the cat was now trapped and relatively powerless. Thinking quickly, Palita approached Lomasha and spoke in a calm, measured tone.

"Lomasha," said Palita, "we have been enemies for a long time, but now we both find ourselves in danger. The mongoose and the owl are waiting to devour me, and you're caught in the hunter's trap. I can help you, but I need your promise that you won't harm me in return. If you shelter me from the mongoose and the owl, I will cut through the ropes and set you free."

Desperate to escape the trap, Lomasha agreed without hesitation. "I promise I won't harm you, little one. Free me, and I will protect you from your enemies."

Palita, trusting in the cat's desperation, scurried under Lomasha's belly, hiding from the watchful eyes of the owl and the mongoose. Seeing Palita take refuge with the

cat, the owl flew away in frustration, and the mongoose slinked back into the undergrowth, knowing it had lost its opportunity.

Once the immediate danger was gone, Palita began gnawing through the ropes of the trap. However, being the cautious creature that he was, Palita didn't rush. He took his time, making sure Lomasha remained trapped long enough for him to ensure his own safety.

Lomasha, growing anxious as dawn approached and fearing the hunter's return, became impatient. "Why are you taking so long?" the cat demanded. "The hunter will be here soon, and I'm still trapped! You promised to free me!"

Palita, still calm, replied, "Lomasha, I haven't forgotten my promise. But I must protect myself, too. If I free you too quickly, you might turn on me. I will cut the last ropes when the hunter is close enough for you to be more concerned with running away than with eating me."

As they spoke, the hunter appeared on the horizon, making his way back to check his trap. Seeing the hunter approach, Lomasha began trembling with fear. Realizing that time was running out, Palita quickly gnawed through

the final ropes. The moment Lomasha was free, the mouse darted back into his burrow, and Lomasha, without a second thought, leapt into the nearest tree to escape the hunter.

Bhishma told this story to Yudhishthira to emphasize a crucial lesson: in times of danger, even an enemy can become an ally, but it is vital to assess the situation carefully and understand the timing, purpose, and potential benefit of such alliances. Forming friendships out of necessity, as the mouse did with the cat, can lead to mutual survival, but the key lies in knowing when and how to act. Just as the mouse used its intelligence to turn the situation in its favor, one must make calculated decisions during challenging times to ensure success.

Reference: BORI Shānti Parva of Mahābhārata, Chapter 136.

The Fox and the Eagle

Long ago, there was a Brāhmin who had longed for a child for many years. Finally, a baby boy was born, but sadly, the boy fell ill and passed away within a few days. Overcome with grief, the parents cried bitterly. The child, who they had hoped would grow up and bring light into their lives, was now gone. The entire family gathered in the graveyard to mourn the loss, carrying the lifeless body of the boy. The Brāhmin was inconsolable, constantly recalling the little joys and games the boy had brought in such a short time, his heart filled with endless sorrow.

As the family wept, an eagle that lived in the graveyard noticed the Brāhmin's grief and approached him. The eagle spoke wisely, "What is the point of sitting here and weeping over a dead body? Do you think your tears will bring it back to life? It is futile to mourn over a body that is now as lifeless as wood. All the joys, sorrows, fortunes, and misfortunes tied to this body have ended with it. Be strong in your mind and heart. Instead of drowning in grief, seek the path of penance to overcome this sorrow. Let go of your attachment, for nothing in this world is eternal. No matter

how much you cry, the dead will not return to life. You will only lose yourself to this endless pain."

The eagle continued, "If you stay here, you will only keep crying, remembering the child's playful moments. Don't let your tears soak the lifeless body. Many have come here—those who have lost their mothers, wives, and children. Everyone must leave this world eventually; no one can remain forever. How long will you stay here mourning? What is the purpose of sitting before a body that can no longer move or see? The sun is setting, and it will soon be dark."

The eagle, being a creature that cannot see in the dark, had its own intentions. It thought that if it could convince the grieving family to leave before nightfall, it could feast on the body. However, the family did not grasp the eagle's hidden motive. Instead, moved by its seemingly wise words, they felt it was indeed rational to let go and leave the graveyard. Thus, they decided to depart, unknowingly giving the eagle the opportunity it desired.

As they were walking away from the graveyard, the grieving parents encountered a fox who spoke to them with empathy and reproach. "How heartless you must be! You couldn't even stay with this sweet child until the sun had set.

It seems you have no compassion for him. Have you not been deceived by the clever words of the eagle? Who knows, by God's grace, the boy might still live."

The fox continued, "You shouldn't abandon this child, who was born from your own womb, without showing mercy. It is not right to leave behind the body of such a son. Even animals and birds mourn their young ones with deep love. How can you, his own parents, walk away? Life is the dearest thing to every being, and though this child has lost his, you should still offer him your final solace. Stay here and weep for him until your hearts find peace."

The fox's words, laden with sympathy and guilt, caused the parents to second-guess their decision. They were torn between the rationality of the eagle's advice and the emotional appeal of the fox, leaving them in deeper sorrow and confusion.

The fox, like the eagle, had its own selfish motives. If the parents left, the eagle would feast on the child's body, leaving the fox with nothing. But if night fell, the fox would have its chance to devour the body undisturbed. Cleverly, it spoke these emotional words to keep the family there until it was dark. The Brāhmin, torn between the eagle's rational

advice and the fox's compassionate pleas, grew increasingly confused. Unsure of what to do, he was overwhelmed by the conflicting advice.

In his helplessness, the Brāhmin turned to Lord, praying for guidance and relief. Moved by his sincere plea, the Lord appeared before him. The Brāhmin asked for his son's life to be restored, and with divine grace, the boy was brought back to life, blessed to live for hundreds of years.

The fox, whose manipulative words had been spoken for selfish reasons, was left utterly disappointed, realizing that, against all odds, its deception had led to the very outcome it had hoped to avoid. The family rejoiced, and the Lord's kindness prevailed, saving the grieving parents from further sorrow. Bhagavān Vyāsa teaches a valuable lesson from this story: People may try to manipulate us with their cunning intentions, disguising their selfish motives as wisdom or compassion. It is important to remain discerning, especially in times of grief or confusion, and to seek true guidance rather than be swayed by the deceptive words of those with hidden agendas.

Reference: BORI Shānti Parva of Mahābhārata, Chapter 149.

Indradyumna

Once upon a time, there lived a noble king named Indradyumna, renowned for his righteous rule and countless Yajnas. His virtues earned him a place among the gods, and he ascended to the heavens. After spending a long time there, however, he was eventually sent back to earth, as his punya had run out. But Indradyumna still believed his good deeds should have left a lasting legacy, so he set out to find anyone who remembered him.

He first met Sage Mārkāndeya, an ancient seer said to have lived for centuries. Bowing before the sage, Indradyumna asked, "Do you remember me, O Sage? I am Indradyumna." But Mārkāndeya, devoted to spiritual pursuits and detached from worldly memories, replied, "I have no recollection of you, King. I neither seek rewards from rituals nor carry memories of those who do."

Disheartened but determined, Indradyumna asked, "Is there anyone older than you who might know of me?" Mārkāndeya thought for a moment and said, "There is an ancient owl named Prāvārakarna who lives in the high

Himālayas. He has seen many eras pass. Perhaps he may know."

Together, they traveled to the snowy mountains and found the wise old owl Prāvārakarna. When Indradyumna humbly asked if he was remembered, Prāvārakarna searched through his memories but finally said, "I'm sorry, I cannot recall you, King. But there is a bird named Nalījangha who lives by a lake nearby; he is older than me and may know something of your past."

With hope renewed, Indradyumna, Mārkāndeya, and Prāvārakarna traveled to the lake, where they found the ancient bird Nalījangha. When Indradyumna asked if he was remembered, Nalījangha replied, "I have indeed heard your name, O King, But there is someone even older than me, a great turtle named Akūpāra, who dwells in the depths of this very lake. He may know more of your story."

Indradyumna felt a surge of hope as he approached the grand old turtle, Akūpāra. "O Akūpāra" he asked, "do you remember a king named Indradyumna?"

At that, the old turtle's eyes filled with tears. With a voice full of reverence, he replied, "How could I forget you,

my king? You were a soul of boundless generosity, who performed countless Yajnas and gave Dāna so plentiful that it even created this very lake. I have lived in these waters my whole life, grateful for the blessings your deeds bestowed on this land."

As Akūpāra finished speaking, a brilliant chariot from the heavens descended, sent by the gods to carry Indradyumna back to Dēvalōka. As he boarded the chariot, the sages praised him, saying:

"Good deeds are like seeds, and as long as they bloom in the memory of others, they sustain one's place in the heavens. In the same way, wrongful acts live on through infamy, anchoring one in suffering as long as they are remembered. Thus, those who seek lasting peace and honor must always strive to do good."

With a sense of fulfillment, Indradyumna ascended once more to the heavens, leaving behind a legacy of virtue that would live on in the hearts of those he touched.

Reference: BORI Vana Parva of Mahābhārata, Chapter 191.

Chyavana

In ancient times, there lived a sage named Chyavana, descended from the noble Brighu lineage. Deeply devoted to his spiritual practices, he took on a rigorous vow of meditating underwater, suppressing all desires and anger, focusing entirely on achieving inner peace and wisdom. For twelve long years, Chyavana remained in the lake, the fish and other aquatic creatures grew accustomed to his presence, swimming close to him and even nestling around him, feeling safe and trusting this gentle figure in their midst.

One day, fishermen arrived at the lake, casting large nets to gather fish. Their livelihoods depended on these catches, and they worked diligently, spreading their nets wide to ensnare as many fish as possible. When they pulled in the heavy nets, expecting a bounty of fish, they were astonished to find the sage Chyavana entangled among the catch. Recognizing the saint, the fishermen gasped in shock, immediately releasing the nets and falling to their knees. They joined their hands in reverence, horrified that they had unknowingly captured such a holy figure. The fish, too, clung tightly to Chyavana, sensing danger.

Seeing the fear in the fish and sensing the fishermen's remorse, Chyavana spoke gently to them, "Do not worry. I hold no anger for your actions, as they were done unknowingly. But these fish cannot be abandoned. If they are to die, I shall die alongside them. But if you release them, I shall consider myself free as well."

The fishermen were filled with reverence and awe, realizing they could not bear the thought of harming such a virtuous man. Unable to make such a decision themselves, they rushed to King Nahusha's court, explaining the extraordinary encounter to the wise and just king.

King Nahusha, understanding the gravity of the situation, hurried to the lake and respectfully approached Chyavana. "Revered sage," he said, bowing low, "your wish is my command. Tell me what I must do to make things right. I am here to ensure that you are treated with the utmost respect."

Chyavana looked kindly at the king and said, "These fishermen were simply doing their duty, as fish are their means of survival. It would be unjust to punish them.

Instead, offer them compensation for releasing me and the fish surrounding me. Only then will I consider myself freed."

Moved by Chyavana's compassion, Nahusha immediately offered the fishermen a thousand gold coins as compensation. But Chyavana gently declined, saying, "No one should set a price on their own life. To do so is a form of arrogance, and it would be a sin for me to assign my own worth. I only know that my value lies beyond gold. Find a more fitting way to compensate these men."

Determined to honor the sage's request, King Nahusha continued to raise his offers, suggesting ten thousand, then a hundred thousand gold coins, and finally his entire kingdom. But each offer was met with the same humble refusal, as Chyavana reminded him that worldly riches, no matter how vast, were insufficient to equate to a life devoted to spirituality and the welfare of others.

Perplexed and in need of wisdom, Nahusha sought the guidance of his Guru, who listened to the king's dilemma and offered his insight: "No amount of gold or treasure can equal the value of a sage, for they are keepers of sacred knowledge and virtue. Only a cow, the holiest of creatures, is fit to be offered as an equivalent. Cows sustain life, they

provide for the world's needs, they are central to rituals, and their very presence brings peace. Offer a cow as a tribute, and it will satisfy the value of the sage's life and work."

With great happiness, King Nahusha returned to Chyavana, announcing his decision to give the fishermen a sacred cow as the sage's price. Chyavana, seeing the wisdom in this choice, smiled and spoke words of blessing, saying, "Indeed, the cow is beyond value. Merely seeing, touching, or donating a cow brings auspiciousness and cleanses one of sin. Cows sustain the world and uphold rituals. They bring prosperity, peace, and abundance to the lands they graze. A cow is a sacred bridge to heaven, revered by humans and Dēvatās alike. You have chosen wisely, King Nahusha."

The fishermen, overjoyed, accepted the cow with gratitude and released the sage along with the fish back into the lake.

Reflecting on this, Bhagavān Vēdavyāsa shared the story to highlight the transformative power of noble company. He taught that the influence of the virtuous is immeasurable, and simply being in the presence of good souls inspires wisdom, compassion, and right action.

Through the company of such individuals, we gain clarity and purpose by the story that upholds the sacredness of life and the unmatched value of a pure, generous spirit.

Reference: BORI Anushāsana Parva of Mahābhārata, Chapters 150-151.

Nala Damayanti

Long ago, in the kingdom of Nishadha, there ruled a noble king named Vīrasēna, who had a valiant son named Nala. Meanwhile, in the neighboring kingdom of Vidarbha, King Bhīma ruled with wisdom and fairness. He had a daughter, Damayanti, who was born by the blessings of Dama. She was her father's beloved and widely celebrated for her unparalleled beauty, elegance, and noble qualities.

As time went on, tales of Damayanti's beauty and admirable qualities reached Nala, while stories of Nala's bravery and charm were conveyed to Damayanti. Though they had never met, both were captivated by what they heard about each other. They found themselves in love, bound by admiration for each other's qualities and virtues, even without having laid eyes on one another.

One day, as Nala wandered through his palace gardens, lost in thoughts of Damayanti, he noticed a flock of swans with golden wings gliding gracefully through the air. Fascinated, he moved closer and managed to catch one of the beautiful birds. Curious, he gazed at the swan, captivated by its shimmering wings and unique beauty.

As Nala held the swan in his hands, to his astonishment, the bird began to speak like a human. "O Prince," it said, "spare my life, and in return, I shall bring you happiness. I will fly to Princess Damayanti and speak to her of your virtues and bravery. She, too, will long for you as you do for her." Hearing these words, Nala's heart filled with hope and he released the swan.

The swan, along with its flock, flew to the kingdom of Vidarbha and landed near Damayanti. The princess and her friends marveled at the golden-winged birds and tried to catch them, laughing and enjoying the spectacle. By chance, Damayanti caught the very swan Nala had spoken to, and, as before, it began to speak.

"O Damayanti," the swan said gently, "there is a prince named Nala in the kingdom of Nishadha. Brave, noble, and possessing charm that matches your own, he is known far and wide. Should you choose him as your husband, joy would bless not only your life but the lives of both your people."

Hearing this, Damayanti's heart raced with joy. She had long dreamed of Nala, and now, the swan's words only

deepened her admiration. Her mind was filled with thoughts of the prince she had come to know only through stories and now through this unexpected messenger. From that moment, Damayanti's longing to meet Nala grew stronger, and she cherished the hope of seeing him one day.

Meanwhile, King Bhīma decided it was the right time for Damayanti to marry. He invited kings and princes from various kingdoms to participate in her swayamvar. The invitation reached far and wide, and many brave and noble suitors eagerly made their way to Vidarbha, hoping to win her hand.

In the heavens, Indra learned of Damayanti's swayamvar through Nārada. Agni, Varuna, and Yama also expressed their desire to attend the event. Together, they descended to Earth, and on their way, they encountered Nala. Indra approached him and spoke.

Indra said, "Agni, Varuna, and Yama are accompanying me to seek Damayanti's hand in marriage. Go and inform her to choose one of us as her husband."

Nala, humbled, responded, "I am heading to marry Damayanti myself, yet you are sending me as a messenger to request her to marry you. Is this fair?"

Indra replied, "Follow my instructions, and everything will turn out well for you. It is impossible to reach Damayanti's chambers with the heavy security around her, but I will bless you with invisibility, visible only to Damayanti. Go ahead and carry out my command."

Obeying Indra's orders, Nala, carrying the gods' message, entered Damayanti's chamber. As he beheld Damayanti's unparalleled beauty, he composed himself, remembering his purpose as a messenger.

Damayanti, startled to see Nala in her room, was filled with wonder. Nala introduced himself, and while Damayanti was overjoyed to see him, he reminded her that he had come solely as a messenger on behalf of Indra. He said,

"Princess, Indra, Yama, Varuna, and Agni will attend your swayamvara tomorrow. You may choose any one of them as your husband."

Damayanti clasped her trembling hands, her tear-streaked face tilted toward Nala as her voice quavered with desperation.

"What am I to do now, O King?" she whispered, her heart breaking with every word. "I have given you everything—my heart, my soul. If you abandon me, I will have nothing left. I would rather drink poison or throw myself into the fire than live a life without you."

Nala's dark eyes softened, though his heart ached. He reached out as though to comfort her but stopped himself, his duty holding him back.

"Damayanti," he said gently, his voice laden with sorrow. "Why do you cling to a mere mortal when the gods themselves desire you? I am nothing compared to them, unworthy even of the dust beneath their feet. How can a man like me defy the divine and hope to survive? Turn your heart to them, for they can give you what I never could—a life of unparalleled glory, filled with heavenly fragrances, eternal beauty, and splendor beyond imagination."

Damayanti's breath hitched as more tears slipped down her cheeks. She shook her head, her voice steady despite the storm raging within her.

"No, my lord," she said with quiet resolve. "I will bow to the gods, but my heart is yours, and yours alone. I will marry none but you."

Nala's hand clenched at his side, his anguish apparent. "Damayanti," he murmured, "I am their messenger. It is my duty to serve the gods, not my desires."

But Damayanti would not yield. Her dark, doe-like eyes burned with defiance, her love for him shining brighter than ever.

"O King," she said firmly, "I have a plan—a way to honor both the gods and my heart's yearning. Were you not also on your way to claim my hand? Come with the gods to the swayamvara. When I choose you in their presence, no blame will fall upon you."

Torn between his duty and his love, he returned to the gods and relayed her plan. Together, they made their way to the Swayamvara Mantapa, a place shimmering with anticipation.

And then, she appeared.

Damayanti walked into the hall, her beauty so radiant it seemed to draw every breath from the room. In her delicate hands, she held the garland that would seal her choice. Her every step was poetry in motion, her every glance enough to steal the hearts of even the most stoic of men.

She moved with purpose, stopping before each suitor, her friend introducing their name, kingdom, and lineage. But when her gaze fell upon five figures—each identical to Nala—her world tilted.

How could this be? How could she find her beloved when the gods themselves had taken his form? Her heart pounded in confusion and despair. Closing her eyes, she let her love guide her.

"If my love for Nala is true," she prayed silently, "reveal him to me. If I have remained steadfast in my devotion, both in word and thought, grant me this blessing. O Gods, show me the one I am meant to marry."

The gods, moved by her sincerity, answered her plea. One by one, they revealed their true forms. Their radiant celestial features stood apart: their garlands never withered,

their bodies never perspired, their forms glowed with divine brilliance.

And then she saw him. Her Nala.

With a joyous gasp, Damayanti's eyes filled with tears of relief. She turned to the gods, her gratitude boundless, and bowed before them in reverence. With their silent blessing, she stepped forward, her heart racing with certainty, and placed the garland around Nala's neck.

The hall erupted in a symphony of cheers and blessings. Elders, sages, and celestial beings alike showered the couple with their goodwill. The gods themselves bestowed gifts upon the newlyweds:

Indra promised Nala the ability to appear at any sacred ritual instantly. Agni vowed to be present whenever Nala called upon him. Yama blessed them with endless sustenance and prosperity.

Their union was blessed, their love now sanctified by the heavens themselves. But as the gods departed, a shadow lingered at the edge of the celebration. Kali watched with a dark fury in his heart.

"How could a mere mortal win the hand of a woman so virtuous, so radiant?" he snarled, his jealousy burning like fire.

Driven by rage, Kali vowed to shatter their happiness. He descended upon Nala's kingdom, searching for a way to sow discord. Yet Nala's unwavering devotion to dharma and his unshakable character thwarted Kali at every turn.

For twelve years, Kali lingered in the shadows, waiting like a coiled serpent with endless patience. And then, one fateful day, his moment arrived. King Nala, hurried and distracted, neglected to wash his feet thoroughly. In that fleeting moment of vulnerability, Kali slipped into his heart. Unseen and insidious, fate unleashed a chain of events that would test the very foundations of love and stretch the endurance of the human spirit to its breaking point.

It began subtly. Nala's brother, Puṣkara, casually suggested a game of dice, a seemingly harmless idea whispered into his mind by Kali's dark influence. Despite the desperate warnings of his ministers and the tearful entreaties of his queen, Damayanti, Nala found himself unable to resist the

call of the dice. Under Kali's spell, the dice betrayed him again and again. Gold, jewels, his mighty chariots, and even the mighty army—all were lost in the relentless spiral of defeat.

Damayanti, the embodiment of grace and foresight, watched helplessly as her worst fears unfolded. When the last of Nala's riches was gone, she quietly called upon Vārśeya, her husband's loyal charioteer. Her voice, though steady, betrayed the storm raging within her.

"Take my children, Indrasena and Indrasenā, to my father's palace in Vidarbha," she instructed. "Ensure their safety. No matter what fate has in store for us, they must be protected."

Her words proved prophetic. In the days that followed, Nala lost his kingdom, his throne snatched away by Puṣkara's cunning. Together, the once-mighty king and his devoted queen walked away from their homeland, stripped of everything but the love that bound them. The citizens, powerless to intervene, wept openly as their beloved monarch left the city gates. But Puṣkara, cruel in his triumph, forbade

anyone from offering aid to the exiled couple—not food, not water, not even shelter.

The wilderness, vast and merciless, became their home. Hunger gnawed at their bellies, and for three days, they survived on nothing but water. Then, as though the heavens took pity on them, Nala spotted a flock of golden-winged birds.

"Perhaps our fortune has turned," he thought, his heart flickering with hope. Using his only remaining garment, he fashioned a makeshift net to trap them.

But the birds were no ordinary creatures. As they ascended into the sky, they laughed mockingly.

"We are the dice you gambled with, Nala," they jeered. "We have come to strip you of your last possessions."

And with that, they vanished, taking his garment and leaving him utterly bare.

Defeated and humiliated, Nala returned to Damayanti, his heart heavy with shame. When he spoke, his voice was barely a whisper.

"How can I protect you, my love, when I cannot even protect myself?" he asked, his head bowed. "Go back to your father's palace. There, you will find safety and peace."

But Damayanti's eyes flashed with defiance. Her voice, though soft, carried the strength of unshakable resolve.

"Do you think I married you for wealth or comfort?" she demanded. "A wife's place is beside her husband—in joy and in sorrow, in triumph and in despair. You are my world, Nala. No hardship, no fate, can change that. I will not leave your side, no matter what destiny decrees."

Her words soothed Nala's tormented soul, but the weight of his guilt remained. Each night, as Damayanti slept, exhausted from their hardships, he lay awake, haunted by her suffering. He could not bear the sight of her enduring such misery because of him.

One moonlit night, Nala made the most agonising decision of his life.

"She will be safe if I leave her," he thought. "If she cannot find me, she will have no choice but to return to

Vidarbha. There, she will have the care and protection I cannot provide."

Tears streamed down his face as he gazed at her sleeping form. The forest around him was silent, save for the rustling of leaves that seemed to echo his sorrow. With trembling hands, he tore a piece of her garment to cover himself. Bowing his head, he whispered a prayer to the gods of the forest and the skies.

"Watch over her," he begged. "Guide her safely to her family."

With one final look at his beloved, Nala turned and walked away into the darkness. Each step felt like a dagger piercing his heart, but his resolve did not falter. He would bear the pain of separation if it meant Damayanti's safety.

When Damayanti awoke, the emptiness beside her hit her like a thunderclap. Panic coursed through her veins as she called out, her voice trembling with anguish.

"My Lord! Where are you?"

She stumbled through the forest, her bare feet bruised and bleeding, her heart weighed down with despair. Her cries rang out into the wilderness, but there was no response. The Queen, once adorned with jewels and silks, now wandered the dense jungle, her beauty and grace cloaked in sorrow.

"Lord," she whispered to the wind, her voice breaking but her determination unshaken. "I will find you. No matter how far you have gone, no matter how long it takes—I will not rest until we are together again."

The distraught Damayanti wandered through the dense forest, crying out for her husband in despair. Her voice echoed through the wilderness, but there was no response—only the haunting silence of the forest answered her calls.

As she pressed on, fate struck a cruel blow. A massive snake, hidden among the undergrowth, coiled around her and trapped her in its powerful grip. Damayanti screamed for help, and her cries reached the ears of a passing hunter. He rushed to her aid, killing the snake and setting her free.

But as the hunter's eyes fell upon Damayanti, he was captivated by her extraordinary beauty. Lust clouded his

judgment, and he attempted to assault her. However, Damayanti's vow of chastity became her shield. Calling upon her virtue and the strength of her resolve, she uttered a powerful curse, and the hunter was instantly reduced to ashes.

Shaken but resolute, Damayanti continued her journey through the forest, her heart still clinging to the hope of finding Nala. By chance, she encountered a group of merchants traveling with chariots, horses, and laden carts. Gathering her courage, she approached the leader of the group and asked, her voice trembling, "Have you seen a man—my husband—anywhere along your travels?"

The merchant leader shook his head, "We have not seen him," he replied. Though the answer dashed her hopes, they offered her shelter for the night. Exhausted and grateful, Damayanti stayed with them, her search far from over.

One misfortune followed another, as though fate was determined to test Damayanti's endurance. In the dead of night, a herd of wild elephants charged into the merchant camp, wreaking havoc in their path. The stampede destroyed valuable goods, trampled tents, and took many

lives. Those who survived were left with grievous injuries and shattered spirits.

Amidst the chaos, the merchants, already wary of Damayanti's presence, began to whisper amongst themselves. They believed that this strange woman was the source of their misfortune. Blinded by fear and anger, they decided to catch her and punish her, blaming her for the calamity.

Overhearing their intentions, Damayanti fled into the darkness, her heart pounding with fear and sorrow. She ran until she could no longer hear their voices, her breath ragged but her will unbroken.

As dawn broke, she found herself among a group of Brāhmins who had also survived the elephant attack. Grateful for their kindness, she continued her journey alongside them until they reached the kingdom of Chēdi.

When Damayanti entered the city, her appearance drew the attention of everyone in the streets. Clad in tattered rags, her hair wild and unkempt, and her face gaunt from hunger and exhaustion, she seemed a shadow

of the queen she once was. The townsfolk stopped in their tracks, staring at her in shock and curiosity.

Children began to follow her, their laughter and mocking words adding to her humiliation. They pointed at her, calling her names and making fun of her disheveled state. Yet, Damayanti walked on, her head held high despite the crushing weight of her sorrow and the jeering crowd. She carried within her the unwavering resolve to find Nala, no matter the obstacles that lay in her path.

Damayanti, weary and distraught, made her way towards the palace, The children who had been mocking her trailed behind, still jeering and laughing. It was a scene that could not go unnoticed.

From the palace roof, the king's mother observed the commotion below. Her gaze fell upon the disheveled woman in rags, who, despite her appearance, radiated an unearthly brilliance. It was as though she had glimpsed a flash of lightning piercing through dark clouds. Struck by Damayanti's beauty and grace, she immediately called for her to come closer.

When Damayanti stood before her, the queen mother gently inquired about her identity and her plight. In a voice weighed down by sorrow but steady with determination, Damayanti explained that she was a woman wandering in search of her husband. Moved by Damayanti's dignity and strength despite her hardships, the king's mother offered her shelter within the palace. But Damayanti, bound by her vow and her principles, laid down certain conditions.

"Rājmāta," she said with quiet firmness, "I am grateful for your kindness, but I am bound by a vow. I will not eat leftover food. I will not wash anyone's feet. I will not speak to any man. Should any of these conditions be violated, I will leave immediately."

The queen mother, impressed by Damayanti's resolve and integrity, agreed to her terms without hesitation. She assured Damayanti that she would be safe in the palace and promised to help her in her search for her husband.

After enduring endless trials, Damayanti finally found a roof over her head, a temporary reprieve from the harshness of her journey. While she rested within the palace of the queen mother, determined to hold on to her hope of finding Nala, her husband wandered the wilderness, lost and alone.

One fateful day, as Nala walked through the dense forest, a desperate cry reached his ears.

"Nala! Save me! Please save me!"

The voice, filled with agony, echoed through the trees. Alarmed, Nala followed the sound and soon came upon a horrifying sight, Kārkōtaka, the black-headed serpent, trapped in the midst of roaring flames, writhing in pain.

The serpent, noticing Nala's presence, called out to him, "O noble king! I am bound by a curse. A great sage decreed that I would remain powerless and immobile until Nala himself arrived to rescue me. Save me from this fire!"

Moved by compassion, Nala did not hesitate. He braved the flames and rescued the serpent from the fire, placing it gently on the ground.

The serpent, now freed from the curse, gazed at Nala with gratitude and said, "O noble one, your compassion has released me from the sage's curse. It is my turn to repay your kindness."

To Nala's shock, the serpent bit him. Before he could react, a strange transformation began. His once-handsome features faded, replaced by a distorted and unrecognizable visage. Bewildered and shaken, Nala turned to a nearby stream and stared in disbelief at his altered reflection.

The serpent spoke again, its voice calm and reassuring. "Do not despair, Nala. This change is not a curse but a blessing. I have disfigured your appearance so that no one will recognize you, keeping you safe from your enemies. My bite did not harm you—it has afflicted Kali, residing within you. From now on, Kali will be tormented by my poison, and his grip over you will weaken. Furthermore, you shall no longer fear any poisonous creature, arrow, or enemy."

Nala, though shaken, listened attentively as the serpent continued.

"Now, go to Ayodhya and seek King Rituparna. Take on the name Bāhuka. Teach him the Ashwa Hridaya(Art of horse mastery), and in return, he will teach you Aksha Hridaya(Mastery over Numbers)—knowledge that will help you reclaim everything you have lost.

"When the time comes to reunite with your wife, your children, and your kingdom, you will regain your true form. These special garments," the serpent said, handing him a set of divine clothes, "will restore your original appearance when you wear them. Keep them safe until that moment arrives."

With those final words, the serpent blessed Nala and disappeared, leaving the disfigured king to ponder the strange twist in his fate. Though his heart was heavy with sorrow, the promise of redemption and reunion lit a spark of hope within him. Taking the enchanted clothes from the serpent, Nala followed its advice and made his way to Ayodhya. There, he sought an audience with King Rituparna and introduced himself as Bāhuka.

"I am a skilled charioteer, capable of driving horses at unmatched speeds," Nala claimed. "I am also an expert in cooking, well-versed in strategy, and proficient in the art of architecture."

Impressed by his talents and demeanor, King Rituparna grew fond of Bāhuka and entrusted him with great responsibilities. The king appointed him as the commander of his army, offering him a salary of ten

thousand gold pieces and treating him with the utmost respect.

Despite his newfound position, Nala's heart remained weighed down by an overwhelming longing for Damayanti. Each night, he found solace in her memory. Even in the grandeur of King Rituparna's palace, surrounded by wealth and honor, Nala's thoughts were consumed by Damayanti. She remained the center of his world, his every moment devoted to her.

On the other hand, Bhīmarāja spared no effort in his quest to find his daughter and son-in-law. He proclaimed a generous reward for anyone who could provide even the slightest clue about their whereabouts.

Responding to this call, many Brāhmins set out in all directions to search for Nala and Damayanti. Among them was a Brāhmin named Sudēva, who eventually reached the kingdom of Chēdi. There, in the palace, he noticed a woman serving food to the Brāhmins. Despite her worn appearance, he instantly recognized her—it was Damayanti.

Seeking a private moment, Sudēva approached her and gently delivered the news of her parents and homeland.

Hearing his words, Damayanti could no longer contain her emotions. Tears flowed freely as she wept before Sudēva, pouring out the sorrows she had kept buried within her heart.

The queen mother of Chēdi and her daughter Sunanda, who had come to care deeply for Damayanti, were overjoyed to learn her true identity. The truth was revealed—Damayanti was the daughter of the queen mother's own sister. What had been a pall of sorrow turned to relief and joy.

Without delay, the queen mother arranged for Damayanti to be sent home in a grand palanquin, accompanied by Sudēva and a royal escort. Upon arriving in Vidarbha, Damayanti was reunited with her parents and her children. Their embrace was filled with tears and joy as the family was finally brought back together.

However, Damayanti's heart remained restless. Her most urgent and cherished goal was to find Nala. Determined, she sent Brāhmins in all directions, instructing them to search far and wide for her husband.

Among the Brāhmins sent by Damayanti, one named Parnāda returned with startling news. He recounted his meeting with a man named Bāhuka in the palace of King Rituparna. Describing Bāhuka's exceptional skills and peculiar appearance, Parnāda expressed his strong suspicion that Bāhuka was none other than Nala in disguise.

Hearing this, Damayanti's heart raced with hope and determination. Without delay, she devised a plan to confirm Parnāda's suspicions. She sent a message to King Rituparna, announcing that her remarriage ceremony would take place the very next day in Vidarbha.

The news reached Rituparna, and he immediately decided to attend the swayamvara. However, Vidarbha was a great distance away, and reaching it within a single night seemed impossible. Yet, Rituparna had unwavering faith in Bāhuka's exceptional charioteering skills. Thus, Rituparna summoned Bāhuka and made him the charioteer for this urgent journey.

As they sped through the night, Bāhuka was tormented by the thought of Damayanti's remarriage. The possibility pierced his heart, but his resolve to uncover the truth drove him forward.

Meanwhile, Rituparna, seated in the chariot, was astonished by Bahuka's mastery of horsemanship and the speed at which they traveled. During the journey, he expressed his admiration and requested Bahuka to teach him the secrets of horse mastery. In return, Rituparna shared with Bahuka his knowledge of arithmetic, Aksha-hridaya—the art of dice that ensured victory in gambling.

As soon as Nala grasped the knowledge of Aksha-hridaya, a dramatic transformation occurred. Kali, who had plagued Nala for so long, was expelled from his body in the form of a shadowy black figure. Kali, freed from Nala, bowed before him in reverence.

"O noble Nala," Kali pleaded, "I have wronged you greatly with my misdeeds. But I ask for your forgiveness. Grant me a boon, so I may redeem myself." From that day forward, anyone who uttered Nala's name would be free from Kali's afflictions.

Nala, now free from Kali's torment, rode his chariot with unmatched skill and speed, reaching the kingdom of Vidarbha before sunrise. Upon arrival, King Rituparna was puzzled to see no signs of celebration or preparations for a

swayamvara. Instead, he was greeted warmly and respectfully by Bhīmarāja, who extended his hospitality.

Meanwhile, Damayanti stood on the upper floor of the palace, watching their arrival with a mix of hope and apprehension. Her heart sank when she did not see Nala among the arrivals, but her suspicions grew stronger as her gaze fell on Bāhuka. Could he be Nala in disguise?

Determined to uncover the truth, Damayanti summoned her trusted companion, Kēśinī, and confided in her. "Go to Bāhuka," she instructed. "Observe him carefully—his behavior, his manner of speaking. Ask him if he knows anything about Nala. Report to me everything you see and hear."

Kēśinī, faithful to her queen, approached Bāhuka and gently questioned him. "Do you know anything about King Nala?" she asked. "Damayanti is consumed with worry and grief. She longs to know where he is and how he fares."

Hearing Kēśinī speak of Damayanti's sorrow, Bāhuka's composure faltered. Tears welled up in his eyes, and his voice trembled with emotion. His grief overwhelmed him, and for a moment, he was unable to respond.

After regaining his voice, he said softly, “I do not know where Nala is. He has hidden his true form, burdened by guilt and despair. The pain of abandoning his beloved wife in the forest haunts him endlessly. You cannot imagine the depth of his grief. Wherever he may be, he meditates on Damayanti day and night.”

Kēśinī listened intently, noting the raw emotion in his voice and the unmistakable love he expressed for Damayanti. With her heart full of questions and hope, she returned to her queen, ready to share all that she had discovered.

Hearing Bāhuka’s heartfelt words, Kēśinī became increasingly convinced that he might be Nala. Determined to gather more evidence, she quietly observed him from a hidden spot, ensuring he would not suspect her presence.

She watched as he expertly tended to the horses with a skill and care that seemed almost otherworldly. Soon after, he began cooking for King Rituparna, and what Kesini witnessed left her astonished. Bāhuka filled a pot with water simply by gazing at it, and when he held a blade of grass to the sunlight, it ignited instantly, creating a fire. Within

moments, and without any assistance, he prepared a feast that looked as though it had been crafted by divine hands.

Kēśinī, amazed by his extraordinary abilities, discreetly took a small portion of the food he had prepared and brought it directly to Damayanti. She recounted everything she had observed, her voice brimming with excitement and awe.

Damayanti listened intently, her heart racing with hope as Kēśinī described Bāhuka's remarkable actions. When she tasted the food he had prepared, the flavors were unmistakably familiar. Tears welled up in her eyes, and a wave of joy surged through her. She was almost certain—this was Nala, her husband.

Yet, the strange appearance of Bāhuka continued to cloud her certainty. To test him further, she decided to send her two children, along with Kēśinī, to see how he would react to them.

Seeing the two children approach, Bahuka's eyes filled with tears of joy. Overcome with emotion, he hugged them tightly and pulled them onto his lap, kissing them

tenderly. For a moment, his love for his children overwhelmed his carefully maintained disguise.

But then, realizing what he was doing, Bāhuka quickly composed himself. Gently, he sent the children back to Kēśinī, masking his feelings behind a stoic expression. "That's all I remember about my children," he said in a dull tone, attempting to dispel any suspicion.

Kēśinī reported everything to Damayanti in detail—Bāhuka's reaction to the children, his words, and his demeanor. Each incident deepened Damayanti's suspicion, but it also increased her anxiety. Unable to contain her emotions any longer, she confided everything to her mother.

Moved by Damayanti's turmoil, her mother approached Bhīmarāja and told him everything. The king, understanding the gravity of the situation, issued a royal order for Bāhuka to appear before Damayanti. Preparations were made to arrange the meeting, bringing Damayanti one step closer to uncovering the truth about Bāhuka's identity.

Kēśinī led Bāhuka into Damayanti's palace, and the moment he laid eyes on her, his grief became unbearable. Tears flowed like rivers as he gazed at his beloved wife.

Though she now lived in the grand palace of her parents, Damayanti still wore the tattered clothes from the day Nala had abandoned her. Her hair remained unkempt, and her appearance mirrored the hardships of her time in the forest.

The sight pierced Bāhuka's heart. He saw not a queen, but the same Damayanti who had followed him into the wilderness with unwavering trust, only to be left alone in the darkness. Damayanti, her voice trembling with sorrow, finally spoke:

"Bāhuka! Have you ever known a husband who abandoned his wife in the middle of a dark forest? A wife who had left behind her family, her comforts—just to follow him, believing in him? Have you seen a man who betrayed his wife's love and trust in the dead of night, leaving her to face the terrors of the wilderness alone?"

Her throat tightened, and tears streamed down her face. Each word carried the weight of her pain, her voice breaking as she poured out the anguish she had carried for so long. Before she could continue, a voice interrupted her—a voice raw with emotion.

"I am that unfortunate Nala!"

The words escaped him before he could stop them. In that moment, the walls of pretense shattered, and Nala stood before Damayanti, his grief and love laid bare.

Nala, overwhelmed with emotion, confessed to Damayanti the torment he had endured due to the calamities inflicted upon him by Kali. With deep sorrow, he recounted the guilt and grief that had haunted him since their separation.

Then, to wipe away the shadow of his disguise, Nala donned the robe given to him by Kārkōtaka. In an instant, his true form was restored, and he stood before Damayanti. The reunion of husband and wife was nothing short of blissful, as they embraced, their hearts finally unburdened. Their children, too, joined in this joyous moment, completing the family once more.

Damayanti's parents, who had endured so much anguish for their daughter, breathed a sigh of relief, grateful that the long ordeal had come to an end. King Rituparna, too, was pleased to learn the truth and returned to Ayōdhya.

Nala, now resolute, turned his attention to reclaiming his kingdom. He challenged his younger brother Pushkara to a game of dice. This time, armed with the wisdom of Aksha-hridaya, Nala emerged victorious, regaining his throne and possessions.

Despite his triumph, Nala harbored no ill will toward Pushkara. Instead of seeking revenge or imposing punishment, he embraced his brother with affection.

Once again seated on the throne, Nala ruled his kingdom with compassion and wisdom. He lived a long and fulfilling reign, cherished by his family and beloved by his subjects. With this, the story of Nala and Damayanti comes to an end.

कर्कोटस्य नागस्य दमयन्त्या नलस्य च।
ऋतुपर्णस्य राजर्षेः कीर्तनं कलिनाशनम्।।

Whoever remembers Kārkōtaka, Nala, Damayanti, and the noble King Rituparna will be freed from the afflictions of Kali and find peace.

Reference: BORI Vana Parva of Mahābhārata, Chapters 50-75.

Aṇi-Māndavya

There once lived a revered ascetic named Māndavya, a seeker who had traveled far and wide, visiting sacred pilgrimage sites in his quest for spiritual enlightenment. Eventually, he chose a serene spot he felt drawn to and built an ashram there. Immersed in deep penance, Māndavya took a vow of silence, standing beneath a tree with his hands raised in prayer. His ashram became a haven of peace, undisturbed by the world's chaos—until fate intervened.

One day, a group of thieves, having stolen great riches, fled into the forest and stumbled upon Mandavya's ashram. Desperate to avoid capture, they hid there, believing the sage's hermitage would shield them. Shortly after, the king's guards arrived at the ashram.

They approached Māndavya, who was steadfast in his vow of silence, and demanded, "Have you seen the thieves? Where have they gone?"

Māndavya, unwavering in his penance, remained still and silent, like a tree rooted deeply in the earth. Mistaking

his silence for guilt, the guards searched the ashram and soon found the thieves, along with the stolen goods.

But their suspicions lingered. Believing the sage to be an accomplice, they arrested him alongside the thieves and brought them all before the king.

The king, unaware of Māndavya's true identity and holiness, treated him no differently from the criminals. Without much investigation, he pronounced the same punishment for all of them: impalement.

The royal servants carried out the grim sentence. Each of the thieves, unable to bear the excruciating agony of the stake, succumbed to death. But Māndavya, though weakened from days without food and the torment of his punishment, endured with unshaken resolve.

Through the unbearable pain, he remained steadfast, his senses under control, his mind fixed on the divine. Though impaled, his spirit soared beyond his suffering, focused entirely on Nārāyana, unwavering in his penance.

After many days, the king's servants were shocked and terrified to find the sage Māndavya still alive on the

stake, deep in penance, showing no signs of death. Overwhelmed, they rushed to inform the king of this miraculous sight. Realizing that the man he had condemned was no ordinary being, the king immediately gathered his ministers and went to the site to see for himself.

Upon recognizing the sage as the revered Māndavya, the king was overcome with guilt and remorse. Falling at the sage's feet, he begged for forgiveness. "O noble one, I have committed a grave injustice against you out of ignorance. Please forgive my sin."

Māndavya, ever compassionate, forgave the king for his actions. However, when the king's men attempted to remove the stake from the sage's body, the tip broke off and remained embedded within him, impossible to extract. He continued his ascetic life, unshaken and serene, with the stake's tip still in his body and came to be called as Aṇi Māndavya

Māndavya sought an audience with the deity of righteousness, Yama, to question the cause of his suffering. With a calm but resolute voice, he asked, "O Lord of Dharma, no matter how deeply I reflect, I cannot recall any sin that

could have warranted such a severe punishment. If I have indeed committed a sin, please reveal it to me."

Yama replied, "O great sage, in your childhood, you once tormented an insect by piercing it with a stick. That act of cruelty was the cause of your punishment. Just as a small act of charity brings immense merit, a small act of cruelty brings great suffering."

Hearing this, Māndavya grew sorrowful and said, "O Yama, a sin committed in childhood is no sin at all. A child lacks the knowledge of scriptures and cannot fully discern right from wrong. Until the age of fourteen, mistakes committed by a child should not be counted as sins. Punishment is applicable only for wrongs done after attaining the age of reason. You have unjustly punished me for a mistake I made in my ignorance as a child. For this injustice, I curse you to be born as a mortal—a Shūdra in your next birth!"

Bound by the sage's curse, Yama was later born as Vidura, the wise and just brother of Dhritarashtra and Pandu.

Lessons from the Story of Aṇi Māndavya in the Light of Acharya Madhva's Tattvavada Philosophy

At first glance, Yama's punishment to Māndavya may appear unjust, but according to Acharya Madhva's Tattvavada philosophy, there is a deeper meaning behind such events. Yama did not actually make a mistake in punishing Māndavya.

So why did Yama accept the curse if he was not at fault? The answer lies in the principle that when Mahātmas perform intense Sādhana beyond their inherent Yogyatā, they often accumulate Punya in excess of what they are capable of enjoying. Nārāyana, ensures balance by subtly orchestrating events to remove this excess Punya. One such way is by making the Mahātmas curse someone, even when that person has not committed any wrong. This curse acts as a means to neutralize the accumulated Punya, bringing the Mahātmas back to their rightful spiritual equilibrium.

In Māndavya's case, the sage's intense penance and spiritual practices led him to earn merits beyond his Yogyatā. The curse on Yama served as a divine mechanism to balance this excess. It is essential to understand that Yama, being an emissary of Bhagavanta's justice, accepted

the curse not as a punishment, but for Krishna's seva during Dwāpara Yuga.

Bhagavanta is extolled as Ēdhamānadwit, meaning "the one who removes anything excessive, whether it is Punya or Pāpa, that exceeds our Yogyatā." He ensures that each soul progresses in accordance with their capacity, neither burdened by excessive sin nor overwhelmed by excessive merit.

While we may marvel at the complexities of divine justice, as ordinary beings, we do not need to worry about accumulating excessive Punya. Instead, our focus should be on avoiding Pāpa, which binds us to the cycle of suffering and samsara. This profound understanding of divine justice and the role of Yogyatā in balancing Punya and Pāpa is one of the many jewels of Acharya Madhva's Tattvavada philosophy, reminding us of the omniscience and compassion of Bhagavanta in all aspects of life.

Reference: BORI Ādi Parva of Mahābhārata, Chapter 101.

Śrīmadhveśa Kṛṣṇārpaṇamastu

About the Author

Ashutosh Prabhu is currently pursuing his master's degree in Mechanical Engineering at National Institute of Technology Karnataka, In addition to his academic endeavors, he is a humble student of Shriman Madhvācharya's Tattvavāda philosophy. During his leisure time, he finds joy in crafting articles and blogs, his writings accessible for interested readers at sudhindraseva.blogspot.com

Vande Guru Paramparām